

JUDAISM

Hellenism and Hebraism Reconsidered

Louis H. Feldman

The Concept of the Chosen People:
An Interpretation

Raphael Jospe

Rationale for the Omission of
Eschatology in the Bible

Noah H. Rosenbloom

Malamud as Modern Midrash

David J. Zucker

Revisiting My Father's Synagogue

Ismar Schorsch

Remembering Irving Howe

Kenneth Libo

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN JEWISH CONGRESS

ISSUE No. 170 / VOLUME 43 / NUMBER 2 / \$6.00

SPRING 1994

STATEMENT OF SPONSORSHIP

The American Jewish Congress is sponsoring the publication of JUDAISM: A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF JEWISH LIFE AND THOUGHT as part of its basic policy to stimulate an informed awareness of Jewish affairs, encourage Jewish scholarship and adequate opportunities for Jewish education, and generally foster the affirmation of Jewish religious, cultural, and historic identity.

JUDAISM, conceived as a free and non-partisan organ, is dedicated to the creative discussion and exposition of the religious, moral and philosophical concepts of Judaism and their relevance to the problems of modern society.

Views and opinions expressed in the articles and reviews are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Editors or the American Jewish Congress.

NOTICE TO AUTHORS

The Editors are always pleased to examine material submitted for publication. Manuscripts should be sent to: Editors, JUDAISM, 15 East 84th St., New York, N.Y. 10028-0458. Unsolicited contributions will be returned only if accompanied by appropriate postage. Upon acceptance by the editors, all copyright in and to such manuscripts will rest with JUDAISM, and authors agree that JUDAISM may copyright such articles in its own name. JUDAISM will publish only original articles which have not previously appeared elsewhere.

Material appearing in the pages of JUDAISM (except for brief passages cited for discussion) may not be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the Editors.

Articles published in this journal are abstracted and indexed in *Religious and Theological Abstracts*, *The Index of Jewish Periodicals*, *Humanities Index*, *Academic Index*, *Social Sciences Citation Index*, *General Periodicals on Disk*, and *Periodical Abstracts*.

JUDAISM: A QUARTERLY JOURNAL is published by the American Jewish Congress. It appears in Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall. Office of Publication: 15 East 84th St., New York, N.Y. 10028-0458. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y. POSTMASTER: send address changes to JUDAISM, 15 East 84th St., New York, N.Y. 10028-0458.

	U.S.	Subscription Rates Canada and Foreign	Institutions/Libraries
1 year	\$20	\$22	\$35
2 years	36	40	65
3 years	50	56	90
* Student	10	12	—

Single copies: for individuals, \$6.00; for institutions/libraries, \$10.00. Back copies, if available, are all at single issue prices in effect when ordered.

* Orders and requests must be accompanied by valid, current student I.D.

All payments for subscriptions and mailings, including outside of the United States, must be paid for in American dollars and drawn on an American bank. Make checks payable to the order of JUDAISM, and send to 15 East 84th Street, New York, N.Y. 10028-0458.

Newsstand distribution in the United States by Bernhard DeBoer, Inc., 113 East Centre St., Nutley, N.J. 07011, Fine Print Distributors, 6448 Highway 290 East, Austin, TX 78723-1038, and Ubiquity Distributors, 607 Degraw St., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11217.

US ISSN 0022-5762

Copyright © 1994 by the American Jewish Congress.

REC'D JUN 0 1 1994

JUDAISM

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL

Issue No. 170 / Volume 43 / Number 2 / Spring 1994

<i>Hellenism and Hebraism Reconsidered</i>	LOUIS H. FELDMAN 115
<i>The Concept of the Chosen People: An Interpretation</i>	RAPHAEL JOSPE 127
<i>Rationales for the Omission of Eschatology in the Bible</i>	NOAH H. ROSENBLOOM 149
<i>Malamud as Modern Midrash</i>	DAVID J. ZUCKER 159
<i>Shylock and the Struggle for Closure</i>	JOHN PICKER 173
<i>Everyman's Intellectual: Remembering Irving Howe</i>	KENNETH LIBO 190
<i>The Sins of the Census</i>	ERNEST NEUFELD 196
<i>Revisiting My Father's Synagogue</i>	ISMAR SCHORSCH 205
<i>The Vanished World of Egyptian Jewry</i>	VICTOR D. SANUA 212
<i>The Bereshit Song</i>	JEFFREY M. COHEN 220

Acting Editor
RUTH B. WAXMAN

Contributing Editors

EUGENE B. BOROWITZ, New York, N.Y. • EMIL L. FACKENHEIM, Jerusalem, Israel • MICHAEL FISHBANE, Chicago, Ill. • DAVID FLUSSER, Jerusalem, Israel • MARVIN FOX, Waltham, Mass. • MAURICE FRIEDMAN, San Diego, Cal. • JUDAH GOLDIN, Philadelphia, Pa. • MAX GRUENWALD, Millburn, N.J. • SUSAN HANDELMAN, College Park, Md. • MENAHEM HARAN, Jerusalem, Israel • ARTHUR HYMAN, New York, N.Y. • ERICH ISAAC, Irvington, N.Y. • MILTON R. KONVITZ, Oakhurst, N.J. • ARTHUR J. LELYVELD, Cleveland, Ohio • ANNE L. LERNER, New York, N.Y. • SOL LIPTZIN, Jerusalem, Israel • EMANUEL RACKMAN, New York, N.Y. • ZALMAN M. SCHACHTER, Philadelphia, Pa. • DAVID WOLF SILVERMAN, Oakhurst, N.J. • SHEMARYAHU TALMON, Jerusalem, Israel • DAVID WEISS, New York, N.Y. • PAUL WEISS, Washington, D.C. • MICHAEL WYSCHOGROD, New York, N.Y.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In increasing measure, modern men are turning again to the quest for a worldview on the issues that are timeless — the meaning of life, the challenge of death, the purpose of suffering, the significance of the individual, his relation to society, and the goal of history. In order to advance this enterprise of spiritual discovery of our time this Journal has been projected. It will be primarily concerned with the philosophy, ethics, and religion of Judaism as a factor in the contemporary world . . .

We are committed to the proposition that Judaism has positive value today for Jews and for the world . . . At the same time, we disassociate ourselves from the dangerous tendency toward the hardening of party lines on the contemporary Jewish scene . . . The members of the Board of Editors belong to every school of Jewish life or to none. The trends popularly referred to as Orthodox, Conservatism, Reform, Reconstructionism, as well as others that as yet have no specific names, have their advocates among us, though no institution or movement is officially represented . . . Undoubtedly, our differences will find expression in these pages, but we shall be at one in opposing the dogmatism which takes for granted that one's own particular standpoint has a monopoly on truth and the authoritarianism which would suppress any contrary point of view.

Judaism will be dedicated to the quest for truth in the spirit of freedom. Our columns will be open to anyone who has something significant to say and the ability to say it well. New and unconventional interpretations, whatever their standpoint, will be welcomed from every source, for we share the conviction of the Talmud that "Both these and the others are the words of the living God." *From the introductory article by Robert Gordis, "Toward a Renaissance of Judaism" in Vol. I, No. 1.*

Hebraism and Hellenism Reconsidered

LOUIS H. FELDMAN

“ARAYNGEFALEN VI A YOVEN IN A SUKEH!”

This widespread Yiddish saying—“Fallen like a Greek into a sukkah!”—shows how far apart, at least in the popular Jewish mind of yesteryear, are Greek and Jewish cultures. The Latin Church Father Tertullian, in the early third century, had already summarized the incompatibility of Hebraism and Hellenism in his famous phrase, “*Quid Athenae cum Hierosolymis?*”—“What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?” The gap has become the subject of a range of jokes, such as the one about the Jew and the Greek who were boastfully comparing notes. Said the Greek: “They were digging recently in Athens, and do you know what they found? Wires. And do you know what that proves? That two thousand five hundred years ago, in the age of Pericles, the Greeks had telephones.” Said the Jew: “They were digging recently in Jerusalem, and do you know what they found? Nothing. And do you know what that proves? That three thousand years ago, when Solomon was king of Judea, the Jews already had the principle of the wireless.”

Jews and Greeks have been comparing notes from at least as early as the sixth century B.C.E., when the prophet Zechariah boldly declared, “I will brandish your sons, O Zion, over your sons, O Greece.” The comparison, from the Greek point of view and in a most complimentary way to the Jews, continued in the fourth century B.C.E., when, according to Clearchus, a disciple of Aristotle, as quoted by Josephus in his essay *Against Apion* (1.176-133), a nameless Jew came to see whether Aristotle really deserved the reputation that he had. In the end, admits Aristotle, “It was rather he who imparted to us something of his own.” Indeed, so impressed was Aristotle by the endurance and sobriety of this Jew in his manner of life that he paid the Jews the supreme compliment of asserting that the Jews are descended from the Indian philosophers.

In the first century C.E., the anonymous author of the treatise *On the Sublime*, an essay in literary criticism second in importance in antiquity only to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, cites the opening chapter of Genesis as an example of the most sublime style. And in the following century, the philosopher Numenius, a great admirer of Plato, pays Moses the highest imaginable compliment when he exclaims, in a passage quoted by the Christian Clement of Alexandria, “What is Plato but Moses speaking in Attic?”

From a Jewish point of view, the contrast was stressed by the Maccabees in the second century B.C.E. in their fierce struggle against the Hellenizers in Judea. It continued in the talmudic period with the curse, said to go back to the time of the civil war between Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II in 65 B.C.E., against

LOUIS H. FELDMAN is Professor of Classics at Yeshiva University.

116 : *Judaism*

the study of Greek wisdom (Bava Kamma 82b, Sotah 49b, and Menahot 64b). It was Paul, in particular, who attempted to bridge the gap with his comment (Epistle to the Corinthians 3:11) that in the Gospel that he preached, there was neither Greek nor Jew.

That Jews in antiquity were already conscious of the similarity and contrast with Greek paganism is suggested in the comparison of the Passover Seder with Greek symposia, such as are described in works by Plato, Xenophon, "Aristeas," Plutarch, Athenaeus, Lucian, and Macrobius. In Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistai*, in particular, we find the practice of asking questions about dietetic problems and riddles, as in the Haggadah of Passover; we find something like *haroset*; there is a discussion of the usefulness of lettuce (eaten at the Seder as bitter herbs); there are three cups of wine (in contrast to the Seder's four); and the meal concludes (as does the Seder meal) with an *afikoman* (a good Greek word, which apparently has something to do with the *komos* ["rev-elry"] at a banquet).

In his famous essay "Hebraism and Hellenism," published in 1869 in his volume *Culture and Anarchy*, Matthew Arnold found that Hebraism (which he identified with ascetic Christianity) and Hellenism have been passing each other through the ages like buckets in a well. Thus, we may note, the Hellenism of the pagan world gave way to the Hebraism of early Christianity, only to be revived in the Renaissance (Pope Leo X in the sixteenth century could openly profess a greater admiration for Plato than for Jesus; and his contemporary Machiavelli contrasted the pagan and Christian virtues to the disadvantage of the latter), then to be discarded again for the Hebraism of the Reformation, then to be revived again by the Enlightenment. Indeed, Goethe showed his abhorrence of the representations of the anemic Jesus by reciting his morning prayers before an image of Zeus, and the Victorian Swinburne preferred Aphrodite to Mary, the *mater dolorosa*. And Heine sharpened the contrast by contending that all men are either Jews or Greeks—either Jews who ascetically question life and nourish their apocalyptic visions, or Greeks who love life with a realism generated by their personal integration.

Arnold, in his essay, contrasts Hebraism, which, he says, stands for conduct and obedience, that is, strictness of conscience and, above all, a consciousness of sin, with Hellenism, whose uppermost thought is to see things as they really are and to think right, that is, spontaneity of consciousness. "Christianity," he says, "changed nothing in this essential bent of Hebraism, to set doing above knowing." "Socrates," he says, quoting a saying attributed to Thomas Carlyle, "is terribly at ease in Zion."

As Lionel Trilling,¹ however, has remarked, Arnold's essay must be seen against the backdrop of the racial theory, nationalism, and imperialism, which were triumphant in his day. Shortly before, and contemporary with Arnold, a number of writers had drawn the contrast between Greek and Jew, notably the Jewish intellectuals Ludwig Börne, Heinrich Heine,² Moses Hess, Samuel David

HEBRAISM & HELLENISM RECONSIDERED : 117

Luzzatto, and Benjamin Disraeli, for whom this was not a mere theoretical problem but one central in their lives—namely, whether and how a Jew can come to terms with the non-Jewish world. Nevertheless, as Milton Himmelfarb³ has noted, Arnold has identified Hebraism with the sectarian Protestantism of his own day; and hence it would seem to be appropriate here to compare Hebraism as understood by Jews with Hellenism. Perhaps we may begin by quoting three passages which illustrate what Arnold would call the Hebraic spirit:

Oh for shame, how the mortals put the blame upon us gods, for they say evils come from us, but it is they, rather, who by their own recklessness win sorrow beyond what is given. (Homer, *Odyssey* 1.32-34)

A man thought the gods deigned not to punish mortals who trampled down the delicacy of things inviolable. That man was wicked. (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 369-372)

For thee this whole vast cosmos, wheeling round
The earth obeys, and where thou leadest
It follows, ruled willingly by thee. . . .
Thou knowest to make the crooked straight,
Prune all excess, give order to the orderless. . . .
One Word—which evermore the wicked flee!
Ill-fated, hungering to possess the good
They have no vision of God's universal law. (Cleanthes, "Hymn to Zeus")

It was Nietzsche who remarked that the Greeks blame the gods; the Jews blame themselves. But if "God" were substituted for "gods" and for "Zeus," these passages, with their emphasis on the consciousness of sin and divine justice, might easily have been thought to come from one of the prophetic books or from the Book of Psalms in the Bible. Yet, actually the first comes from Homer; the second, from Aeschylus; and the third, from the "Hymn to Zeus" of Cleanthes, the Stoic philosopher who lived in the third century B.C.E. Let us start, then, *de novo* and compare the Hebraic and Hellenic attitude toward God and toward man. As to God, it is usually said that the Greeks stand for multiplicity and variety, whereas the Jews stand for unity. And yet, Xenophanes (fragments 11, 15, 16), who lived in the sixth century B.C.E., attacks the view of the gods in Homer and Hesiod, who were, in effect, the Bible of the Greeks, criticizing them for attributing to the gods "everything that is a shame and reproach among men, stealing and committing adultery and deceiving each other," and remarks that if horses had hands and were able to draw with them, their gods would take the form of horses, and that the Ethiopians say that their gods are snub-nosed and black. On the other hand (fragment 23), he posits "one god, greatest among gods and men, in no way similar to mortals either in body or in thought."

Moreover, the Greeks are sometimes said to look upon life as eternal being, whereas the Hebrews looked upon it as eternal becoming. But this is

precisely the dispute in the fifth century B.C.E. between Parmenides and Heraclitus, both of whom, of course, were Greeks.

As to man, Arnold would have us identify Hellenism with the intellectual impulse in contrast to Hebraism, which he identifies with the moral impulse. The prime example of Hellenism is Socrates, whose motto is, as stated in Plato's *Apology*, "The life [intellectually] uncriticized is not worth living." Hellenism is thus the enemy of fanaticism. Hellenism, says Arnold, speaks of thinking clearly, of seeing things in their essence and beauty, whereas Hebraism, as we see particularly in the prophets, speaks of becoming conscious of sin. The Greek quarrel with the body and its desires is that they hinder right thinking, whereas the Hebrew quarrel with them is that they hinder right acting. Nietzsche, developing this theme, formulates the view that Hellenism says yes to life and love, whereas Hebraism says, "Thou shalt not!"

Yet, even Arnold acknowledges that Aristotle, at least, notes that of the three prerequisites for virtue—knowledge, deliberate will, and perseverance—the last two are all-important and the first is of little importance. While it is true, as he remarks, that both Plato and Aristotle rank the moral virtues below the intellectual virtues, we must remark that Plato's *Republic*, that most influential of ancient works, while identifying virtues with knowledge, proceeds to stress the practical applications of these virtues. Moreover, it is precisely the fact that the Greek gods in Homer, Hesiod, and the Greek plays are not identified with morality that leads Plato to exclude these poets from the curriculum of his ideal state. Furthermore, anyone who has read E. R. Dodds's *The Greeks and the Irrational* will realize how grossly exaggerated is the view that the Greeks were rationalist worldlings.

As to the Greek spirit not being concerned with conscience, what are we to make of the story told by Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, about the mistress of one of the tyrannicides who had lived a youth of immorality but who, when questioned under torture, bit her tongue out rather than betray her lover? "Which," asked Zeno, clearly impressed by her strictness of conscience, "would you rather have? Her years of lightness and love or her last hours of heroic agony?" On the other hand, in his demanding of God a rationale to explain his apparently unfair and even meaningless suffering, Job is Hellenic, according to Arnold's definition. Indeed, if Hellenism is so far apart from Hebraism, we may well ask how to explain the apparent attraction that Hellenism had for many Jews in the Hellenistic period.

In their lack of concern about conscience, the Greeks are said to have looked with disdain upon pity as an undesirable trait, whereas the Tetragrammaton is said to denote God's aspect of mercy (Genesis Rabbah 33.3); indeed, apparently growing out of the concept of *imitatio Dei*, for the Jew (Mic. 6:8) mercy is one of the three primary qualities required of him by God. One sees the Greek concept for pity—in particular, in Aristotle's view (*Poetics* 6.1449b) that tragedy serves the purpose of purging the spectator of the nega-

tive emotions of pity and fear. And yet, here too there are ample indications that not all the Greeks looked with disdain upon pity. Thus we hear that in Athens there stood an altar dedicated to pity, and that when it was proposed to celebrate the gladiatorial shows in Athens, Demonax the Cynic (see Lucian's *Demonax*) declared that the Athenians would first have to remove the Altar of Pity. The Epicureans, moreover, looked upon it as a positive trait. Cicero (*Pro Legario* 12.37), indeed, goes so far as to state that there is no more admirable trait than pity.

Moreover, to say that the Hebrews were unworldly pietists is to ignore the plentiful evidence in the Bible itself, where we see how often they are engaged in wars with their neighbors and how frequently the prophets must chide them precisely for their unworldly practices. In addition, to say that Hebraism says no to life and love is to omit such episodes as Jacob's love for Rachel and the whole saga of the judges and Saul and David and Solomon. Furthermore, to assert, with Heine, that the Greeks were only beautiful youths, whereas the Jews were strong and steadfast men, is to neglect an Achilles on the Greek side and a Joseph on the Hebrew side. Again, to contrast, as does Heine, the Greek spirit of beauty with the Hebrew spirit of sublimity and intensity is to neglect an Antigone on the Greek side and a David on the Hebrew side. In our own day Saul Tchernichovsky, in his poem "Before the Statue of Apollo," recognizes that the sensory joy of life and the beauty in nature were once present in Jewish experience, but laments that centuries of oppression and rootlessness have drained these attitudes from the Jewish people.

As to identifying the Hebrews as unworldly pietists, one thinks how the most influential of rabbis at the end of the first century, Joshua ben Hananiah, reduced such extremism to absurdity with his argument (Bava Batra 60b) that if, because of their mourning for the destruction of the Temple, Jews declined to eat meat or drink wine, since they were part of the Temple service, they should not eat bread or first fruits or even drink water, since they, too, were part of the service. Indeed, the very opening of the Mishnaic tractate Yoma (1:1) indicates that the High Priest had to be married at the time that he performed the service on the Day of Atonement. Ben Azzai (Yevamot 63b) is castigated for not marrying, and he himself uses extraordinarily strong language there in admitting that one who does not engage in the propagation of the race is as though he sheds blood.

Judah Ha-Levi formulates the difference between Hebraism and Hellenism in terms that the Greek culture bore flowers but no fruit, by which he meant that it was intellectual and aesthetic rather than moral. Similarly, according to Arnold, Hellenism is concerned with beauty and rationality of the ideal and tends to keep difficulties out of view. We recall that Arnold's contemporary, Ernest Renan, in the same vein, addressed his "Prayer at the Acropolis" to Apollo, the god of clarity, reason, and harmony, and that he asked for forgiveness for having concerned himself with the unclear, unreasonable, and

unharmonious Semitic matters. Lev Shestov, in his *Athens and Jerusalem* (1933), though by no means sympathetic to the Greek point of view (philosophy, he felt, should concern itself primarily with questions that cannot be answered by reason but only by the “cries of Job,” that is, by direct human experience), has similarly painted the contrast in terms of the objective reason of the Greeks as against the subjective revelation of the Hebrews.

But if so, we may ask, what is the point of the Greek tragedies that have come down to us if it is not that life is not one-sided and simple? To say, furthermore, that Hebraism lacks the sunny optimism of the Greeks and is, instead, marked with a sense of sin, is to ignore chorus after chorus in the Greek tragedies, representing, in effect, the ideal spectator and the author himself, in which we see a basically pessimistic view of life. One thinks of the last lines of the most famous play of all, Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King*: “Here is the truth of each man’s life: we must wait and see his end, scrutinize his dying day, and refuse to call him happy till he has crossed the border of his life without pain.” That this was not an isolated sentiment but one widely held and influential, may be seen from its occurrence in Herodotus (I.32), who quotes it in the name of the revered wise leader Solon (Aeschylus [*Agamemnon* 928-929], Euripides [*Trojan Women* 509-510, *Heracleidae* 865-866, *Iphigenia at Aulis* 161-163, and *Andromache* 100-102], and Aristotle [*Nicomachean Ethics* 1.1100A10-11]). One thinks of the jar of the first woman Pandora, which contains all evils, and this includes even hope. One recalls, furthermore, Hesiod’s formulation of the five ages of history, each worse than the preceding; contrast this with the opening chapter of Genesis, in which the phrase “And God saw that it was good” appears five times. Man is the very climax of creation, and it is after his creation that we find the phrase, “And God saw everything that He had made and behold it was very good” (Gen. 1:31).

To say, with Arnold, that Hellenism, unlike Hebraism, is not primarily concerned with conduct and that the moral virtues are secondary to the intellectual, is to neglect such a passage as this in Homer’s *Iliad*, Book 16: “Even as beneath a tempest the whole black earth is oppressed, on an autumn day, when Zeus pours forth rain most vehemently, being in wrath and anger against men who judge crooked judgments forcefully in the assembly and drive justice out, and reckon not of the vengeance of the gods.” The fact that this statement, in which Zeus stands for justice, appears in a simile, would seem to indicate that it is an editorial comment, so to speak, on the part of Homer. Again, at the beginning of Book 1 of the *Odyssey*, Zeus is quoted as complaining that mortals blame the gods for their afflictions, when actually it is their own failings, notably greed and folly, that are to blame. Moreover, Hesiod (*Works and Days* 252) asserts that thrice ten thousand watchmen of Zeus guard justice and note cruel deeds. Furthermore, he insists that Zeus with ease straightens the crooked and rebukes the proud. Surely Socrates (Plato, *Apology* 32A-C) showed moral courage when, as chairman for a day of the Council of Five Hundred, he defied

HEBRAISM & HELLENISM RECONSIDERED : 121

an hysterical, unconstitutional public demand for the execution of the generals who had failed to recover the bodies of several hundred soldiers killed in a sea battle, and again when he refused to share in the policy of the Thirty Tyrants in their persecution of Leon of Salamis.

Moreover, to contrast the Greek and the Hebraic view of the Divine by asserting that the Greek gods were immoral, whereas the Hebrew view of God is of perfect morality, is to neglect the remarks of Xenophanes, who complained that Homer and Hesiod assigned to the gods all that was disgraceful and blameworthy, notably stealing, adultery, and deceit. Pythagoras insisted that the gods must be ethical; and we hear that when he visited Hades, he saw Homer and Hesiod being punished because of what they had said about the gods. Moreover, to Heraclitus is ascribed the statement that Homer deserves to be chased out of the lists and beaten with rods. And, in a famous passage, Plato (*Republic* 2.377-379) insists that the poems of Homer and of Hesiod not be included in the curriculum of the ideal state since they represent the gods as immoral.

In our own days, Boman⁴ has vividly painted the contrast as follows: "The matter is outlined in bold belief by two characteristic figures: the thinking Socrates and the praying Orthodox Jew. When Socrates was seized by a problem, he remained immobile for an interminable period of time in deep thought; when Holy Scripture is read aloud in the synagogue, the Orthodox Jew moves his whole body ceaselessly in deep devotion and adoration . . . Rest, harmony, composure, and self-control—this is the Greek way; movement, life, deep emotion, and power—this is the Hebrew way." Boman may well be thinking of the attitude of a Hasid; but swaying is by no means necessarily characteristic of the deeply pious Mitnagid. And any student of the Talmud will be aware of the great premium placed there upon clear and logical thinking.

Ferguson⁵ has remarked that there is no real Greek word for "to sin," and that the verb *hamartanein* really means "to miss the target," like, we may add, the Hebrew *hata'*. He also notes that where we use the phrase "to take something to heart," the Greek uses the verb *nouthetein*, which literally means "to put in the mind." The word *sophrosyne* ("moderation") is related, etymologically, to the word *phronesis* ("thought"). He cites Nietzsche's statement that whereas other nations had saints the Greeks had sages.

The problem with such an analysis, however, is that it fails to note a number of passages in Greek literature containing the verb *hamartanein* in the very sense of "sin," which patently contradict it. Thus, for example, in a famous passage, Homer (*Iliad* 9. 500-501), in the words of the wise old Phoenix, Achilles' tutor, remarks that "man turns [the hearts of the gods] with prayer as often as anyone transgresses and sins." Likewise, Hesiod remarks that "Often even a whole city suffers for a bad man who sins and devises presumptuous deeds." Again, Herodotus (1.133) says that according to the Persians, one who has leprosy is not permitted to consort with other Persians; "they say that he is so afflicted because he has sinned in some wise against the sun."

To say, moreover, that other nations had saints but that the Greeks had sages is to neglect the fact that the Jews, at least in the talmudic period, refer to their saints as *talmidei hakhamim*, that is, wise students. It is surely significant that the same community of Jews produced Pharisees and Sadducees and Essenes and the Dead Sea Sect (twenty-four in all, according to the Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin 10.6.29c), and individuals as diverse as Yohanan ben Zakkai and Josephus and Elisha ben Avuyah. The Talmud, far from being a dogmatic code, is more like a Congressional Record of the debates of the sages. And in what other religion is the study of such disputes a form of divine worship?

Actually, Judaism seems to place a premium upon doubt, so that we may suggest that for the Jew, faith is doubt once removed. For the Jew, the most sincere form of closeness to God is doubt; indeed, doubt once removed is good *kavanah* ("intention"). The Jew's credo is, to paraphrase Descartes, *Dubito ergo sum. Dubitare est humanum*. Who is a Jew? A Jew is someone who thinks. Talmudic texts treat punctuation and sentence structure very casually, so that a statement can often be read in a positive or negative sense and can express an assertion as well as a doubt or a query. The word *teku*, indicating that a given dispute remains unresolved, appears no fewer than 319 times in the Babylonian Talmud. Is there any other religion that has a major, seminal work with so many issues unresolved? Where but in Judaism can one have a scenario in which God Himself is outvoted? But that is precisely the case in the Talmud (Bava Metzia 59b), where the miracles of an uprooted carob tree, a stream flowing backwards, walls caving in, and a heavenly voice supporting the view of Rabbi Eliezer, are unavailing to sway the vote of a human Sanhedrin; and what is perhaps even more amazing is that the Talmud there records God's pleasure at being outvoted! The typical Yiddish intonation to this day is a question mark, and the typical Jewish joke is, "Why does a Jew answer a question with another question?" To which the prompt reply is, of course: "And why not?" As Elie Wiesel has put it, only the Jew opts for Abraham, who questions, and for God, who is questioned.

In fact, the born Jew is defined not in terms of creed or deed but rather in terms of the identity of his mother, so that Judaism turns out to be more of a family or a nation than simply a religion. For what other religion is an expression comparable to that of a Jewish atheist not a contradiction in terms? A talmudic saying (Sanhedrin 105a) has it that "Impudence, even against Heaven, is of avail." The wondering Jew in thought is as typical as the wandering Jew in space. Indeed, in the introduction to his *Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides, in response to the question whether it is permissible to ask fundamental questions of faith, asserts that it is not only permissible but actually mandatory, inasmuch as there is a commandment to love God, which is possible only through the intellectual love of God, namely, through using one's mind in asking questions. Furthermore, Maimonides criticizes Job, noting that he was punished because he accepted everything on tradition; he was virtuous but not intelligent

and, consequently, deserved to be punished. Mordecai Kaplan is once said to have remarked that theology is the immaculate conception of thought not sired by experience. Why do Jews feel so much at home in the United States? Perhaps it is because this is the only country that has a national anthem that begins and ends with a question: "Oh say, can you see? . . . Oh say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave?"

Matthew Arnold, moreover, would have us believe that a major difference between Hebraism and Hellenism is that the former is monolithic and intolerant, whereas the Greeks exhibited extraordinary tolerance and diversity. But the extraordinary rarity with which foreigners were admitted to citizenship in ancient Athens, Pericles' proposal (which was adopted) to remove from the citizenship rolls those who had only one parent born in Athens, the requirement that only those who spoke Greek were permitted to participate in the Eleusinian Mysteries, and the conviction of Socrates on the grounds of atheism and corrupting the youth—all seem to argue otherwise. On the other hand, we may note the positive attitude of Jews toward *Benei Noah*, those non Jews who take it upon themselves to observe the seven commandments given to Noah, according to tradition. Moreover, even the sacrifices in the Temple were intended not merely for Jews but also for all of mankind, as we see in the fact (Sukkah 55b) that on the holiday of Shemini Atzeret, seventy bullocks were offered on behalf of the seventy nations of the world.

Furthermore, in contrast to the provincial attitude of the Athenians when it came to extending citizenship to foreigners, there is ample evidence in the writings of pagan authors (such as Horace, Tacitus, and Juvenal), Philo, Josephus, Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and the New Testament (notably Matthew 23:15, which declares that the Pharisees compass sea and land to make one proselyte) that the Jews, especially between the second century B.C.E. and the first century C.E., were successful in converting many to their religion.⁶ As to the rabbis, with relatively few exceptions, they were extremely favorable toward accepting proselytes. One thinks, for example, of the statement (Pesahim 87b) of the third-century Eleazar ben Pedat that the only reason why God dispersed the Jews was in order to facilitate proselytism. This eagerness may also be seen in the rabbis' portrait of Abraham (Sifre Deuteronomy 313 on Deuteronomy 32:10), who is described as so good a missionary that he succeeds in causing God to be known as king of the earth as well as of heaven.

As to the alleged inflexibility of Judaism, even the divinely-inspired sacred Bible was subject to many diverse interpretations and modifications, such as we find in the Septuagint, Philo, the Targumim, the Midrashim, Josephus, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Apocrypha, and the Pseudepigrapha.

Can we formulate a thesis that will explain the gulf between Athens and Jerusalem? I believe that we can do so by noting the differences between them in their attitudes toward time and history. For the Greeks, the study of history may be useful, as Thucydides states (1.22), since events of the past will occur,

in all probability, in the same or in a similar way. For the Jew, it is not merely useful; it is a commandment (Deut. 32:7) to remember the days of old; it is a commandment (Deut. 7:18) to remember what God did to Pharaoh; it is a commandment (Deut. 25:17-19) to remember what Amalek did to the Israelites in the desert.

A goodly portion of the Bible is a history book; the very fact that a work which is the sacred book of the Jews begins with a narrative, namely, Creation and the Flood, which has no direct connection with the Jews, is an indication of how important history is for those for whom it is a sacred account. Moreover, the first occurrence of the word *kadosh* ("holy") in the Bible is in connection with a unit of time, the Sabbath (Gen. 2:3). Indeed, the commandment to observe the Sabbath is connected, in the two versions of the Ten Commandments, with two events in time, namely, Creation (Exod. 20:11) and the Exodus from Egypt (Deut. 5-15). All the pilgrimage festivals were understood in the written or the oral tradition to be grounded in historic events: Passover with the Exodus from Egypt, Pentecost with the Revelation at Sinai, Tabernacles with the sojourn in the wilderness after the Exodus. Moreover, the New Year was said to commemorate Creation; and the Day of Atonement was said to commemorate the day when the sin of the Golden Calf was forgiven. The only holiday which does not have a historical connection is the New Moon; and we may suggest that one reason for its decline in importance since the days of the Pentateuch and the prophets is precisely this, that it did not have a historical connection. Even circumcision, which was widespread in the ancient world, being found in Ethiopia, Egypt, Golchis, Phoenicia, and Syria (Herodotus 2.104.2-3), is given a historical connection, namely, the treaty of God with Abraham, *berit Avraham*.

This centrality of time may be seen in the wording of the sanctification prayer, the Kiddush, that is recited over wine in ushering in the pilgrimage festivals, blessing God for sanctifying "Israel and the times." Henri Bergson, we may remark, was very Jewish in making time the vehicle of his world conception. In the words of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, the Jew's catechism is his calendar. The fact that the Dead Sea Sect, as well as the Sadducees and the Karaites, had a calendar different from that of the Pharisees was surely a major point of contention amongst them.

Indeed, the Jew is required to identify himself with history; at the Passover Seder, the text reads: "In each and every generation a person is obligated to regard himself as if he personally had come out of Egypt, as it is said (Exod. 13:8), 'You shall tell your son on that day saying: This is done because of what God did for me when I left Egypt.'" It is not a coincidence that the Jews are the first to write great history. Others may be God-intoxicated; the Jew is history-intoxicated. In contrast, the Greek verb "to know" (*eidenai*) is related to the verb "to see" (*idein*); even the word for "idea" comes from this verb "to see"; the Greek, consequently, is interested in things rather than events. No Greek ever heard his gods order him to remember.⁷ Even in grammar, the Greek has a

timeless aorist tense, such as is lacking in Hebrew, and this tense represents both a past time and an eternal present.

An important point of difference between the Jewish and Greek attitudes, again connected with time, is to be seen in the nature of God. For the Jew, God operates in history: He created the world; He formed compacts at various points in history with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the Israelites at Sinai. His very name, *'Eheyeh 'asher 'eheyeh* (Exod. 3:14), indicates that He manifests Himself in time. In particular, He is identified with historic events (Num. 15:41): "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt." He is identified in the language of time: He is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob; history is conceived of as a straight line with a beginning (Creation), a middle (the various encounters of God with the patriarchs, Moses, etc.), and an end (the messianic redemption). Indeed, the prophets are at least as much interpreters of the past as they are predictors of the future.

In contrast, no Greek god is ever identified as the god of Aegeus or Theseus or Cadmus; nor is there a particular goal of redemption. In general, the Greek view of time was cyclical;⁸ and, according to the Stoics, the most influential philosophy in the ancient world in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, the history of the world is an endless succession of creation and destruction; and, far from having a final goal, in the course of twelve thousand years (the *annus magnus*) the world will return to its original starting point. While it is true that Judaism does have the concept of the end of time and of a day that is "wholly Sabbath" as a restoration of an Eden-like existence, this is conceived of as a final goal; whereas for the ancients the completion of the *annus magnus* is viewed as merely the beginning of a new cycle of events.

Moreover, the Greeks do not conceive of the gods as creating the universe, but rather see the world as eternal. Their conception of the gods identifies them with nature; they evolve out of a primordial substance antedating and transcending them. In contrast, the Jewish God transcends nature. As Yehezkel Kaufmann contends, an abyss separates the religion of Israel from that of paganism. The difference is not merely an arithmetical one between monotheism and polytheism, since the Jewish conception of God rejects the pagan idea of a realm beyond deity and recognizes His sovereign transcendence over all.

The importance of time for Judaism may likewise be seen in the fact that in determining from which commandments women are free, the criterion is positive commandments which have a particular time attached to them (Mishnah, Kiddushin 1:7). In fact, the ethical code is grounded on historical events, notably the prohibition to oppress the stranger, "for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exod. 22:21, Deut. 10:19) and, indeed, the commandment (Lev. 19:34, Deut. 10:19) to love the stranger as oneself.

In summary, Judaism is centered on time rather than on space. In answer to the question, "What was God doing before creation?" Augustine replies that He was creating a Hell for those who ask this question. The answer, of course,

is that for God there was no “before,” since God is not limited by time but created time itself; but for the Jew, “before” and “after” are key terms. Indeed, time is arguably the greatest thing that God created; and hence for the Jew to waste time is sharply condemned, since a primary article of the Jewish faith is that time is sacred. A child asked Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotzk: “Where is God?” He answered: “Whenever you let Him in, not ‘where’ but ‘whenever.’” For the Jew, not place but time and history are the true loci of godliness. And regardless of their theological tenets, all Jews share a common history; and recent history has taught that even those who did not share a common faith had a common fate.

NOTES

1. Lionel Trilling, *Matthew Arnold* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), p. 234.
2. Warren D. Anderson, *Matthew Arnold and the Classical Tradition* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1965), p. 176, notes that it is to Heine, and ultimately to Heine’s source, Börne, that Arnold owed the antithesis of Hebraism and Hellenism.
3. Milton Himmelfarb, *The Jews of Modernity* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 299.
4. Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, trans. by Jules L. Moreau (London: Westminster, 1960), p. 205.
5. John Ferguson, *Moral Values in the Ancient World* (London: 1958), p. 51.
6. See my *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), especially pp. 288-415.
7. So Arnaldo D. Momigliano, *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1977), p. 195.
8. An exception, perhaps, was the fifth-century B.C.E. Anaxagoras. See G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), p. 390.

The Concept of the Chosen People: An Interpretation

RAPHAEL JOSPE

1. Chosenness: Some Conceptions, Misconceptions, and Comparisons

THE CONCEPT OF THE “CHOSEN PEOPLE” HAS been widely misunderstood, by Jews and Gentiles alike. It has, in addition, been one of the focal points of Jewish-Christian dispute, going back to the earliest centuries of Christianity, with Christians claiming to have supplanted the Jews as *Verus Israel* (“the true Israel”), while the Jews continued to regard themselves, and themselves alone, as maintaining Abraham’s special covenantal relationship with God.¹

The concept of chosenness is clearly closely connected or correlative to this concept of covenant (*berit*). What I shall attempt to demonstrate below is that chosenness means neither privilege nor any innate Jewish superiority, whether explicit or implicit. Rather, what the biblical and post-biblical sources emphasize is an internally-directed Jewish responsibility to live in a certain way, based on the Torah, and the promises of divine blessing are conditioned upon Israel’s fulfilling those covenantal responsibilities.²

Because of the centrality of the concept of the Chosen People to much of Jewish religious experience, and because of its having been the focus of so much animus in Jewish-Christian relations over the centuries, I believe that the concept merits serious reconsideration and reevaluation in our day. Besides the obvious historical factors, our generation, which has witnessed both the murder of one-third of the Jewish people in the Holocaust and the renewal of Jewish nationhood in the state of Israel—the poles of Jewish national powerlessness and power—needs to reassess what meaning chosenness can have in our lives as Jews and in our relations with non-Jews in general and Christians in particular.

I single out the Christians here for two reasons without implying in any way that other religious traditions, especially Islam, are less worthy of serious consideration and recognition by Jews.³ Nevertheless, Islam does not specifically posit a concept of chosenness, and the concept of the Chosen People

RAPHAEL JOSPE is Senior Lecturer in Jewish Philosophy at the Open University of Israel in Jerusalem and Hebrew University of Jerusalem, School for Overseas Students.

128 : *Judaism*

has therefore not been the focal point of Jewish-Islamic dispute, as it has with Christianity. Moreover, whereas in recent decades we have been witness to an increasingly open and frank relationship between Jews and Christians, at least in some parts of the world, the same cannot, regrettably, be said of Jews and Muslims. The unavoidable involvement of religion in the Jewish-Arab dispute, which is primarily national rather than religious *per se* in nature, and the growth of militant Islamic fundamentalism,⁴ by and large preclude the kind of dialogue between Jews and Muslims to which many Jews and Christians have become accustomed.

This paper attempts “an interpretation” of some dominant themes, and does not intend to present an account of how the concept of the Chosen People is dealt with in Jewish literature and thought, from the Bible down to our own day.

Let me note at this point that while chosenness as a specifically theological notion may well be unique to the Jewish people (and to those Christians who see the Church as somehow supplanting or supplementing the Jews as *Verus Israel*), in a broader sense we find parallels in other cultures. The Jews are not the only nation to see themselves as distinctive and special, as being challenged with exemplary moral tasks or as being obliged to fulfill a unique historic destiny.

The Greeks took understandable pride, however arrogant from our point of view, in their accomplishments, and their regard for the nations they encountered and conquered as *barbaroi*⁵ was not always unwarranted.

Consider, for example, the funeral speech of Pericles (d. 429 B.C.E.) in ancient Athens. As reported by the historian Thucydides in Book II of *The Peloponnesian War*:⁶

Let me say that our system of government does not copy the institutions of our neighbors. It is more the case of our being a model to others, than of our imitating anyone else. Our constitution is called a democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of the whole people. . . . This is one point in which, I think, our city deserves to be admired. There are also others. . . . Again, in questions of general good feeling there is a great contrast between us and most other people. . . . We are unique in this. . . . Taking everything together then, I declare that our city is an education to Greece.

The Romans took over from the Greeks much of this sense of historic superiority, including its corollary notion of a kind of *noblesse oblige*. As Vergil (70-19 B.C.E.) put it in the *Aeneid* VI:851:⁷

You, Roman, remember to rule the peoples by your power (these being your arts), to impose the way of peace, to spare the conquered, and to put down the proud.

The Jewish notion of chosenness cannot necessarily be translated outside the context of biblical monotheism into pagan Greek and Roman terms. But the

THE CONCEPT OF THE CHOSEN PEOPLE : 129

pagan mind could, in a sense, go even further than claims of divine election, by believing in the divine descent of the nation.⁸ Aeneas was, after all, the son of Venus and the Trojan Anchises, and Romulus and Remus were the sons of Mars and the priestess Ilia.

Modern nations have not necessarily employed ancient religious terminology and imagery to express their feelings of historic mission and destiny, but how different are the Greek attitude toward the *barbaroi* and the Roman concept of *Pax Romana* from the British imperialism of Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), when he wrote:

*Take up the White Man's burden
Send forth the best ye breed —
Go, bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness
On fluttered folk and wild—
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child.*

In this context, one might also consider the nineteenth-century American doctrine of "Manifest Destiny," or in the twentieth century, the Periclean echoes resounding in Woodrow Wilson's call that "the world must be made safe for democracy,"⁹ and again in John F. Kennedy's inaugural address.

These calls differ substantively, in their idealistic spirit and democratic intent, from classical and European imperialism, but they have in common, at least formally, the idea that this particular nation was historically destined to play a greater role and to lead other nations toward universal goals.

Whatever formal similarities may, then, exist between the concept of the Chosen People and the claims of other cultures to national preeminence, there is one clear essential difference. Whether because Jews have, for most of their history, lacked the power to impose their will or religious way of life upon their non-Jewish neighbors,¹⁰ or whether they found no such impulse mandated in the Torah, the belief in chosenness has rarely, if ever, been translated into domination or coercion of non-Jews.

Moreover, although the medieval poet and philosopher Judah Ha-Levi (1085-1141) proposed what we would categorize as a racial theory to explain the historic anomalies of Jewish national survival and distinctiveness, his theory cannot be considered racist, in the sense of asserting that the Jews should conquer or dominate other groups. In fact, his theory has the opposite intent.¹¹ It is offered as an attempt to provide a natural-scientific explanation of what Ha-Levi considered to be anomalous but indisputable historic facts, and he emphasized that, on moral and intellectual grounds, there are no differences between Jew and non-Jew.¹² Even the appropriation (or, to my way of thinking,

misappropriation) of Ha-Levi's theory in later mystical and Hasidic thought down to our own day, does not propose racist domination such as we find in Kipling.¹³

As I understand them, therefore, the Jewish sources do not support interpreting chosenness to mean some kind of Jewish racial superiority. Nevertheless, in terms of social-psychology, the notion of spiritual superiority, however inaccurate academically, may have been valuable for the survival of a minority consistently oppressed for some two thousand years. Whereas, by contrast, black Americans in recent decades have had to overcome the indoctrination of racial inferiority by white American culture,¹⁴ a Jewish spiritual or moral "superiority complex" can only have been reinforced by oppressive and coercive behavior on the part of the majority culture. After all, Jews thought, if the Christians or Muslims really represented religious truth, as they claim, why cannot they persuade us of it, and why do they have to resort to force? The more desperate the oppression, the more the oppressors reinforced the Jewish view that they, the victims, were the true Chosen People, and that the oppressor religions were all the more morally and spiritually bankrupt.

However useful a "superiority complex" may therefore have been in social-psychological terms, it is inaccurate and unjustified by the classic Jewish sources of chosenness.

2. Chosenness and Salvation: Inclusive or Exclusive?

The concept of the Chosen People may be clarified if we first attempt to understand what it is not. In this context, the first point which cannot be over-emphasized is that *chosenness does not imply any exclusivity of salvation*.

For our purposes, the precise conception of salvation—this-worldly or other-worldly, collective or individual, naturalistic or supra-naturalistic—is immaterial. What is significant in this context is that the concept of the Chosen People does not imply that only Jews benefit from such salvation.

Unlike much of classical Christianity, which claims that the only way to salvation is through Christ¹⁵ ("I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me," John 14:6), or the Christian Church (*Nulla salus extra ecclesiam*), the Jews claim no such exclusivity of salvation. To the contrary; the view which became normative and was codified by Rambam (Moses Maimonides, 1135-1204), is that *hasidei 'umot ha-'olam yesh la-hem helek ba-'olam ha-ba'*, "the righteous of the nations of the world have a portion in the world to come."¹⁶

A study of the pertinent rabbinic sources makes it apparent that, despite the lack of a systematic theory, the criteria applied by the rabbis for salvation were generally moral, not national or partisan.¹⁷ wicked Jews are denied, and righteous Gentiles are granted, a portion in the world to come. For example:

THE CONCEPT OF THE CHOSEN PEOPLE : 131

Rabbi Eliezer says: None of the Gentiles has a portion in the world to come, as it says: "The wicked will return to the grave (*she'ol*), all the nations forgetful of God" (Ps. 9:18). "The wicked will return to the grave," these are the wicked of Israel. Rabbi Joshua said to him: Had Scripture said, "The wicked will return to the grave, all the nations," I would have been silent, and I would have agreed with you. However, Scripture said, "forgetful of God"; there are righteous people among the nations, and they have a portion in the world to come (*yesh zaddikim ba-'umot she-yesh la-hem helek la-'olam ha-ba'*).¹⁸

In other words, whereas Rabbi Eliezer believed that wicked Jews and all Gentiles have no portion in the world to come, Rabbi Joshua pointed out that Rabbi Eliezer was misreading the verse in Psalm 9:18. The Psalmist did not refer simply to "all the nations," but to "all the nations forgetful of God." The criterion for exclusion from salvation ("a portion in the world to come") is, therefore, not national; the Gentiles *per se* are not excluded. The wicked are excluded, be they "the wicked" of Israel or "the nations [=Gentiles] forgetful of God."¹⁹

Christianity, with Paul, extended itself beyond the bonds of what it saw as "carnal" Jewish peoplehood and was willing to include in its midst only believers in its message, the new "spiritual Israel," while excluding from salvation everyone else. Rabbinic Judaism could not possibly include in the Jewish religion people who were not members of the Jewish nation,²⁰ but had no reason to exclude from salvation the righteous of other nations. In short, whereas Christianity is much more inclusive in this world, it is much more exclusive in the next, while Judaism is much more exclusive in this world and inclusive in the next.

As I understand them, both the Jewish and Christian positions on salvation developed logically and consistently, based on radically different presuppositions about reality and readings of Genesis.

In the classical Christian view,²¹ because of Adam and Eve's original sin in the Garden of Eden, all people ever since have been, and are, in a state of sin. Sin is the ultimate and inevitable human condition. No person can therefore be so perfect in his or her deeds, so blameless in his or her behavior as to merit divine salvation or favor. Therefore, with Jesus as Christ, a new opportunity for salvation was presented to people.

The prophet Habbakuk had said: *ve-zaddik be-'emunato yihyeh*, "the righteous will live by his faithfulness" (Hab. 2:4). The term *'emunah* in biblical usage does not mean "faith" in the cognitive sense of "faith" or "belief" in something. Rather, like the English terms "faithfulness" and "fidelity" (as well as the Greek term *pistis*, which the Septuagint uses here), the term indicates trust, loyalty, honesty, much as it does in a marital context. It does not mean to "believe in" (such as the cognitive statement, "I believe in God," i.e., I acknowledge as true the proposition that there is a God), but to "believe" (as when a person says, "Believe me"), i.e., to trust.²² The term *'emunah* in this passage thus means that the righteous person should live faithfully, i.e., he

132 : *Judaism*

should live a trustworthy, honest life; or, alternatively, that the righteous person should live by his, i.e., God's faithfulness (since the pronomial suffix "his" here is unspecified).²³

In any case, whatever Habbakuk originally meant here, the verse was taken by Paul, and by subsequent Christian thought (especially that of Martin Luther, for whom this Pauline doctrine was of cardinal importance), in an entirely different direction. As Paul construes it, it is through faith (*pistis*), rather than through deeds, that the righteous person will attain the eternal life of salvation.

For I am not ashamed of the Gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." (Rom. 1:16-17)

Now it is evident that no man is justified before God by the law; for "He who through faith is righteous shall live." (Gal. 3:11) ²⁴

Classical, i.e., Pauline Christianity, thus develops a logically consistent reading of Genesis. According to this Christian view, salvation, in the sense of justification before God, cannot be merited on the basis of one's deeds; original sin precludes such perfection. Salvation can be attained only by the unmerited grace of God, on the basis of faith in Jesus as Christ.

Recognizing the consistency of the Christian reading does not, however, constitute agreement with its interpretation of Genesis or its understanding of human life.

The Hebrew term for sin is *het*, from the verb *hata* ', which literally means to miss the mark (as when shooting at a target).²⁵ As such, it does not indicate a condition or state of being, but acting improperly, in a wrong direction. Therefore, Martin Buber, whose fine insights into the nuances of the Hebrew language permeated his biblical interpretations, suggested that sinning is turning away from, rather than turning toward, the other.

The Christian concept of "original sin" accordingly follows neither from the text of Genesis nor from human nature, as understood Jewishly. Sin is not inevitable. Genesis 4:7 does not state that a person will inevitably or necessarily sin, but only that there is always the opportunity to sin: "If you do not do well, sinfulness lies at the door." The door is always there—but the verse in no way implies the inevitability of passing over that moral threshold. To the contrary, the verse continues to assert that the person can control the sinful impulse: "Its desire is for you, but you can rule over it."²⁶ At least from a Jewish perspective, this verse cannot be construed as suggesting the doctrine of original sin.

Similarly, Genesis 8:21 has also been construed by Christians as teaching the doctrine of original sin. There are Jewish interpretations which understand "the nature (*yezer*) of man's heart is evil from his youth (*mi-ne 'urav*)" as meaning that man has an evil impulse from the time he is born (cf. Rashi),

THE CONCEPT OF THE CHOSEN PEOPLE : 133

although they, too, do not thereby conclude that sin is inevitable, let alone caused by Adam and Eve's original sin. A more creative interpretation is offered by Ramban (Moses Nahmanides, 1194-1270), who suggested that the particle *mi* be understood not as "from" but as indicating causation ("on account of"), so that the verse means that "the nature of man's heart is evil on account of his youthfulness," i.e., the impetuous immaturity of the human being.

However the textual difficulties presented by these verses should be resolved, the main point is clear. The stories of Genesis are not usually understood as teaching the notion of original sin. As Martin Buber has put it, we sin not because Adam and Eve sinned, but as they sinned.

Even those Jewish interpretations which do draw some kind of causal connection between what Adam and Eve did and how we behave, do not, and could not, possibly thereby conclude that, because of original sin the "works of the Law" are to be replaced by a system of faith as the basis for salvation.

Christianity's exclusive view of salvation and Judaism's inclusive view are both consistent theories based on diametrically opposed readings of the text of Genesis and the human condition. From a Jewish perspective, however, the exclusivity of the Christian scheme of salvation is inconsistent with the justice of God, Who cannot be conceived as condemning to damnation the bulk of humanity (who lived before the time of Christianity or who never had the opportunity to hear the Gospel). In the words of Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786):

Inasmuch as all men must have been destined by their Creator to attain salvation, no particular religion can be exclusively true. . . . A revelation that claims to be the one and only road to salvation cannot be true, for it is not in harmony with the intent of the all-merciful Creator.²⁷

Who, then, are the righteous Gentiles recognized as sharing in the world to come? According to Rambam (Maimonides),²⁸ they are non-Jews who follow what the rabbis called "the seven commandments of the children of Noah." The seven commandments of the children of Noah, which the rabbis deduce from Genesis, include (1) the prohibition of idolatry, (2) the prohibition of blasphemy, (3) the prohibition of murder, (4) the prohibition of incest and adultery, (5) the prohibition of theft, (6) the prohibition of eating a limb of a living animal, and (7) the requirement to establish a legal system of justice.²⁹

Regardless of how these laws were specifically deduced by Jewish tradition, and whatever their precise meaning and authority, what is clear is that they are consistently regarded not as Jewish laws but as universally applicable. They were given to Adam and Noah, the respective progenitors of all of humankind. Their universal priority to the national laws given to Israel in the Torah is thus both logical and chronological. They are, in basic terms, the laws upon which any just and ethical society must be founded, and they provide the standard to which all people are expected to adhere.

134 : *Judaism*

A clear corollary of one's attitude toward the inclusivity or exclusivity of salvation is one's attitude toward proselytism. The missionary impulse, which is so central to certain types of Christianity and is so widely resented, if not feared, by many Jews and other non-Christians, is a logically consistent outgrowth of Christian exclusivism. If a person truly believes that he or she has the exclusive keys to salvation, basic human decency and morality, as well as logic, dictate that those keys be shared with, or at least offered to, one's fellow man, who will otherwise perish in damnation.

The missionary impulse, then, need not be at all insidious. Even in the Middle Ages, there were Popes and other Church leaders who recognized that coercive methods are not only wrong in principle but practically counter-productive. And in our post-Holocaust day, many sensitive Christians recognize that overt missionary activity aimed at the Jews is out of the question, theologically, politically, and as a matter of good taste and friendly relations. Some today, for example, argue that the only way to teach the Gospel is to live it, not to preach it. Nevertheless, the logical dilemma for Christians remains. If there is only one way to salvation, how can the Jews not need that way? And if, conversely, the Jews do not need that way, why does anyone else?³⁰

Whereas Christian exclusivism logically leads to proselytism, whether active or passive, Jewish inclusivism need not lead in any such direction. In fact, although proselytes are accepted in Judaism, they are generally not actively encouraged (and often are actively discouraged in at least some circles).

As Rambam wrote:³¹

Moses our teacher only bequeathed the Torah and the commandments to Israel . . . and to those of the other nations who wish to convert. . . . But one may not coerce a person who does not wish it to accept the Torah and the commandments. Moses was commanded prophetically to compel all humans to accept the commandments enjoined on the children of Noah. . . .

Since all the righteous share in salvation, there is no inherent reason for a non-Jew to take on the additional burdens of being a Jew. The non-Jew, as we have seen, must fulfill the seven Noachide commandments; in simple terms, he must be a decent, moral human being. No more is required of him for salvation. The Jew, however, has the obligation to live according to the laws of the Torah, which contains, according to rabbinic tradition, 613 commandments.

According to the logic of Christian exclusivism, when a person accepts Jesus, he thereby gains the key to salvation by faith. But there is no parallel logic in Jewish inclusivism. Since all people who are morally upright can attain salvation, why take on the heavy obligations of the Torah's 613 commandments?

There were times in history when Jews engaged, or are said to have engaged, in active proselytism. However, for much of Jewish history in the past two thousand years such proselytism was strictly prohibited, and severely

THE CONCEPT OF THE CHOSEN PEOPLE : 135

punished, in Christian and Islamic countries. Regardless of the particular historical circumstances, there simply is no logical impulse to encourage actively, let alone to seek, proselytes. As Moses Mendelssohn put it, echoing Rambam some six hundred years earlier:

According to the principles of my religion, I am not expected to try to convert anyone not born into my faith. . . . Our rabbis hold unanimously that the written as well as the oral laws that constitute our revealed religion are binding only for our own people. . . . All other nations were enjoined by God to observe the law of nature and the religion of the patriarchs. All who live in accordance with this religion of nature and of reason are called "the righteous among other nations"; they too are entitled to eternal bliss. Far from being obsessed by any desire to proselytize, our rabbis require us to discourage as forcefully as we can anyone who asks to be converted. We are to ask him to consider the heavy burden he would have to shoulder needlessly by taking this step. We are to point out that, in his present state, he is obligated to fulfill only the Noachide laws in order to be saved but that upon his conversion he will have to observe strictly all the laws of his new faith or expect the punishment which God metes out to the lawbreaker.³²

The concept of the Chosen People thus does not imply any exclusivity of salvation. To the contrary, it implies no additional benefits, but only additional responsibilities—the regimen of the 613 commandments of the Torah. Proselytes who wish to take on the responsibilities of living according to the Torah may join the Jewish people, but they have no obligation to do so.

Chosenness thus implies no requirement for Jews to impose their will, to dominate or rule the non-Jews (as we saw in the first section of this paper); nor does it provide them with any inherent reason to seek to convert them (as we have seen in the second section of this paper).

3. Chosenness: A Mutual Covenant

According to a famous ditty: "How odd of God / To choose the Jews." To which the response is: "It's not so odd / The Jews chose God!"

Chosenness is mutual; the chosen people is also the choosing people. There are those who argue that, logically and chronologically, God must have initiated the choice, and that the alternative is to preempt the divine initiative and to force God's hand, as it were. Even then, God's choice of Abraham and his descendants would have been meaningless had it not been reciprocated. David Novak proposes such a view in a forthcoming study:³³

The election of Israel involves not only the free act of God but, also, the free act of Israel. The fact of election designated by the word "covenant" (*berit*) is not a bilateral pact mutually initiated by God and Israel. It is, rather, an historic reality created by God. Nevertheless, this historical reality would have no human meaning without Israel's free acceptance of it and participation in it.

The covenant could not function in the human world if Israel had not, does not, and will not *respond* to God's election of her. However, the response is an

acceptance of the prior event of God's choice. When Israel does not respond—which is all too frequent—God reiterates the choice again and again and again. The covenant is always initiated by God not by Israel, even when Israel's reiteration of it comes centuries after the initial covenantal event.

Novak's position is well reasoned and certainly is in harmony with many of the traditional sources. However, as might be expected, other views may be found in the literature. Let me touch on two radically differing medieval views, both of which reverse the logic and chronology of election.

Judah Ha-Levi, as has been mentioned above, developed a theory that the Jews possess a divine biological faculty enabling them to communicate prophetically with God. Just as animals have faculties of sensation and voluntary locomotion lacking in the vegetable kingdom, and as only the human species, among the entire animal kingdom, possesses the faculty of reason, so there is one nation endowed with this "divine power" (Arabic: *amr ilahi*; Hebrew: *'inyan 'elohi*). Adam was created with this faculty, and it was transmitted among certain individuals over the generations down to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, after which it became transmitted to all of Jacob's children and all their descendants. Ha-Levi makes it clear that this faculty is biological; it is not the Torah which enables the Jews to attain the "divine power." Rather, because they are born with it, they, and only they, could receive the Torah in divine revelation.³⁴

The implication for our purposes, therefore, is simply this. Ha-Levi's theory means that one cannot argue that God chose Abraham and his progeny. Rather, because only Abraham, and subsequently the Jewish people, were already endowed with the biological capacity to receive divine communication, God could reveal the Torah to them. This is not to say that the Jews first chose God. It means that God could choose only them to receive the Torah because they alone had the prior capacity to receive it. The Jews did not choose God, but it was the Jews who made God's choice possible.

The approach taken by Rambam (Maimonides) in the *Guide of the Perplexed* I:63 differs fundamentally from that of Judah Ha-Levi. Nevertheless, we have here an even clearer case for the initiative of the Jews, specifically their ancestor Abraham, who, Rambam suggests, arrived at a rational understanding of God through "speculation and reasoning" (Arabic: *nazar wa-istadal*; Hebrew: *'iyyun u-mofet*):

At those times everyone who claimed to be listened to either claimed, like Abraham, that speculation and reasoning had come to him indicating to him that the world as a whole has a deity, or else he claimed that the spirit of a star or an angel or something similar had descended upon him. Yet that an individual should make a claim to prophecy on the ground that God has spoken to him and sent him on a mission was a thing never heard of prior to Moses.³⁵

THE CONCEPT OF THE CHOSEN PEOPLE : 137

In his earlier *Code*, Rambam described Abraham as weaning himself from the prevailing idolatry and contemplating the cosmos, without the benefit of any teacher, until, at the age of forty,

he attained the way of truth and apprehended the right line by his correct reason (*tevunah*), and he knew that there is one God who governs the sphere and created everything, and that in all existence there is no God besides Him.³⁶

Whereas Judah Ha-Levi had argued that the philosophical concept of the impersonal “God of Aristotle” is intellectually inferior to, and less existentially compelling than, the biblical concept of the personal “God of Abraham,” Rambam in effect is arguing that the God of Abraham is the God of Aristotle.

Returning now to the question of chosenness, whether or not we find Rambam’s portrait of Abraham as a philosopher or protophilosopher persuasive, the interesting thing is that the initiative is entirely Abraham’s. God did not choose Abraham; rather, Abraham discovered God.³⁷

The issue of chosenness is further complicated by a certain ambivalence in Jewish tradition regarding Israel’s willingness to become God’s covenantal partner. There are two opposing trends in Jewish tradition regarding how the Jews received the Torah. According to the one view, God first offered the Torah to other nations. However, only Israel was ultimately willing to accept the covenantal relationship with God: Moses “took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; they said, ‘Whatever the Lord has spoken we will do and we will obey (*na’aseh ve-nishma*)’” (Exod. 24:7).³⁸ The other traditional view, which is equally authentic, is that God held Mount Sinai over the heads of the Israelites, and threatened to drop it on them if they did not accept the Torah.³⁹

Whether the divine or human partners are seen as having initiated the covenant, and whether Israel is seen as having agreed to the terms of the covenant freely or under coercion, there can be little doubt that the subsequent relationship between God and Israel was seen as a mutual partnership.

The term *berit* is etymologically obscure, but at least according to some scholarly opinion it is derived from the root *b-h-r*, to choose. The *berit* thus means that the partners choose to establish an ongoing relationship, and the biblical usages of the term denote what we would call a treaty, alliance, or constitution. The story of the “covenant between the pieces” (*berit bein ha-betarim*) in Genesis 15 suggests why the term for establishing or formalizing such a *berit* is *karat*, meaning to cut.

The mutuality of the covenantal relationship between Israel and God is expressed, implicitly or explicitly, throughout the Torah, Prophets, and Writings, and perhaps most clearly in Deuteronomy. In its most basic terms, Israel’s responsibility is to be loyal to God alone and to obey the divine law. God, in turn, promises Israel continued protection, national success, and prosperity in the promised land. In addition, when Israel will receive drastic but deserved

138 : *Judaism*

punishment, God will not permit his promise to their ancestors to be broken by allowing them to be completely destroyed. They will suffer, but ultimately they have the reassurance that they will be restored to their former position.⁴⁰

God's promises, however, are conditional upon Israel's fulfilling its obligations. It is ultimately, therefore, how the Jews behave that will determine their fate. The covenant confers upon them no privilege or license. To the contrary, it imposes upon them heavy responsibilities.

As the sign of the covenant, Abraham is given the commandment of circumcision, which is accordingly called *berit milah*, "the covenant of circumcision."

This is my covenant which you shall observe between me and you and your seed after you: circumcise for yourselves every male. Be circumcised on the flesh of your foreskin, that it become a sign of the covenant between me and you. At the age of eight days shall each male for all your generations be circumcised . . . so that my covenant may be in your flesh as an eternal covenant. As for any uncircumcised male who does not circumcise the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has violated my covenant. (Gen. 17:10-14)

In addition to the play on words here (whoever fails to "cut" the covenant by circumcision will be "cut off"), I think it is particularly significant that the "covenant of circumcision" is established just at the moment when Abraham has been promised progeny, that his name and ideas would survive. The promise of national survival, physical and spiritual, is thus inscribed onto the flesh of the organ of procreation.

The "covenant of circumcision" is so fundamental in Judaism that it takes priority over other laws of the Torah, such as the Sabbath. That priority is both logical and chronological. It is chronological because it is the first specifically Jewish commandment (before it there are only the seven Noachide commandments as well as the general commandment to Adam and Eve, to "be fruitful and multiply"). As such, it precedes by several hundred years the commandment to observe the Sabbath, which the Jews received after the Exodus from Egypt, as they entered the Sinai wilderness. The Sabbath, then, is the second "sign" of the covenant:

The children of Israel shall observe the Sabbath, to make the Sabbath for their generations an eternal covenant. It is eternally a sign between me and the children of Israel. (Exod. 31:16-17)

Circumcision is also logically prior to the Sabbath, because it is performed on the male child by virtue of the simple fact of his being a Jew, of his very Jewish identity. It is not dependent, as is the Sabbath, upon any particular subsequent affirmation or observance. One is a Jew, and is marked as such in infancy. The Sabbath, on the other hand, is an obligation consequent upon that prior existential fact.

4. Chosenness and Moral Responsibility

Chosenness cannot legitimately be construed to indicate some kind of privilege or license. It certainly does not mean that Israel, in fact, is better than, or superior to, any other nation. This is most clearly enunciated by the prophet Amos in two passages that, at first glance, appear contradictory.⁴¹

In Amos 9:7 we find God reaffirming human equality; even the Exodus from Egypt is not unique: "Children of Israel, are you not like the children of the Ethiopians to me, says the Lord; have I not brought Israel up out of the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Crete, and Aram from Kir?" This would seem to contradict Amos's earlier statement, "Only you have I known among all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2).

The earlier statement, however, does not grant the Jews, in fact or in theory, any superiority. The term *yada'* (know) in biblical usage does not refer to abstract cognitive knowledge, but to an intimate experiential knowledge, which is why the term also means—and is not a "euphemism" for—sexual intercourse.⁴²

God and Israel have an intimate relationship. This grants to the Jews, however, no special rights or privileges. On the contrary, the verse continues: "Therefore I will inflict upon you all of your transgression."

It is precisely because of the special, intimate relationship that Israel has with God that it can be held accountable for its wrongdoing. Others may seek to excuse their behavior because they did not realize what they were doing. Israel can make no such excuse; the Jewish people should know better.

Putting it differently, transgression is always inherently wrong. However, for a Jew, who, as Amos suggests, should know better, that transgression is a double wrong, because it is simultaneously a violation of the covenant. Any human being has the basic obligations of the seven commandments of the children of Noah. The Jew has the broader range and higher standard of the 613 commandments of the Torah. The covenant grants no special privileges; it imposes special responsibilities.

This perspective on chosenness can perhaps be understood in terms of the standard that parents apply to their children. When the child comes home from school or play, and the parents see the child has done something wrong, they ask: "You know that's wrong; why did you do it?" To which, if the child doesn't say, "I don't know," he or she often responds: "But everyone was doing it." Typically, then, the parents will reply: "It doesn't matter what everyone else was doing. You are our child, and—having taught you what is correct—we expect more of you."

The point here is not that the child is, in fact, better than the other children. The parents are telling the child that, because they love him or her, and care especially about him or her, they therefore expect more; whatever others may do, they expect their child not to betray their love and trust, but to do what they know is right.

Moral responsibility is the basis of the covenant from its very beginning with Abraham. This is evident not only in the later rabbinic and philosophic literature, but in the biblical literature; and within biblical literature, it is evident not only in the later writings of the prophets, but in the Torah itself.

Consider the fact that the fulfillment of God's covenantal promises to Abraham and his descendants (possession of the land, national victory, success and prosperity, etc.) is conditional on Israel's behavior.

The ethical imperative of the covenant clearly underlies the story in Genesis 18 of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah:

The Lord said, Shall I cover up from Abraham what I am about to do? For Abraham will become a great and mighty nation, through whom all of the nations of the earth will be blessed. I have known him, in order that he might command his children and his household after him, that they observe the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice (*la'asot zedakah u-mishpat*). (Gen. 18:17-19)

Then Abraham, who later (in Genesis 22) would respond *hineni* ("Here I am") when God called him to sacrifice his son Isaac, protests and argues with God. Noah, it will be recalled, uttered no protest when he was informed of the impending destruction of the whole world. Abraham, by contrast, protests the destruction of a town infamous for the wickedness of most of its citizens:

Forbid it to you, to do such a thing, to kill the righteous together with the wicked, so that it would be the same for the righteous and for the wicked. Forbid it to you. Will not the judge of all the earth do justice? (Gen. 18:25)

What gave Abraham the right to argue with God? Noah had not protested a universal destruction, but now God not only accepts Abraham's challenge, he anticipates it.

In a similar vein, contrast God's acceptance of Abraham's challenge with his response to Job "out of the storm":

Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? . . . Where were you when I founded the earth? (Job 38:2-4)

Why does God resort to an *ad hominem* argument to disqualify Job's challenge, whereas he accepts and meets Abraham's challenge? The answer in both cases, I believe, is that both Noah and Job were righteous, upright men (cf. Genesis 6:9 and Job 1:1), who are described as innocent (*tam, tamim*). However, neither is a member of the Chosen People. Noah, of course, antedates the covenant. In the case of Job, there is no obvious evidence to indicate his precise national background or time, although his country 'Uz and the ethnic-geographic background of the other characters in the book are not Israelite. According to at least one rabbinic tradition, Job was the most righteous (*zadik*) Gentile who ever lived.⁴³ The ethical dilemmas raised by Noah and especially by

THE CONCEPT OF THE CHOSEN PEOPLE : 141

Job are not specially Jewish. The problems of evil, injustice, and the suffering of the innocent are fundamentally human problems of universal import and application.

Abraham, however, is the founder of the Chosen People; he is not a universal figure, but, rather, is the first person with whom God had the special relationship of covenant. Abraham was the first person of whom God could use the intimate language, "I have known him, etc.," and, in turn, was the first person described as being a lover of God: "You are Israel my servant, Jacob, for I have chosen you, the seed of Abraham my lover" (Isa. 41:8).

The intimacy of the covenant permits, and the higher ethical responsibility of the covenant requires, Abraham to challenge divine injustice. God, as the source of justice, must be just.

5. Chosenness and Holiness

The covenant sets the Jews apart from other nations. They are expected to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (*mamleket kohanim ve-goy kadosh*), in the words of Exodus 19:6. The Hebrew term *kadosh* (usually translated as "holy") denotes something distinctive, different or special. That is why it is used, for example, as the term for betrothal and marriage (*kiddushin*), where the partners "sanctify" or "hallow" each other most basically by the exclusive nature of their relationship, in which they are "special" to each other and "different" from all others.

The ethical imperative of the covenant requires a sense of being special or distinctive: behavior which may be permitted or tolerated in others is unacceptable in someone special. Therefore, the holiness code begins with the Israelites being told: "You be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy" (Lev. 19:2).

Holiness, for example, is the only rationale explicitly and consistently mentioned in the Torah in connection with the system of *kashrut* (the dietary laws). Although some later Jewish philosophers attempted to explain *kashrut* naturalistically, alleging that various physical benefits accrue to those who observe it and that the Torah prohibits harmful foods,⁴⁴ the Torah makes no such claim. The promise of "lengthening of days," found elsewhere in the Torah, is never mentioned in this context. What the Torah does say is that *kashrut* serves to distinguish the Jews as a "holy people."

Differentiate between the pure beasts and the impure, between the impure birds and the pure, and do not make yourselves abominable with any beast or bird or whatever crawls on the earth, which I have differentiated for you as impure. You should be holy for me, for I the Lord am holy, and I differentiate you from the nations to be mine. (Lev. 20:25-26)

For you are a holy people to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you from all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his special people. Do not eat any abomination. . . For you are a holy nation to the Lord your God; do not cook the

142 : *Judaism*

kid in its mother's milk. (Deut. 14:2-3, 21; cf. Exod. 22:30 and Lev. 11:44-47)

Not all Jews affirm this concept of distinctiveness. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that diet is an extremely effective social mechanism for ensuring distinctions.

It should be clear that the Jewish people are holy only if they obey the laws of the Torah. The holiness must be attained; it is not inherent. Even a theory such as Judah Ha-Levi's, which attributes Jewish distinctiveness to an inhering biological faculty, emphasized that this "divine power" is latent, and can be activated only under certain conditions and by correct behavior.

If, then, the Jews "observe my covenant," they will be holy:

Now, if you obey me and observe my covenant, you will be a treasure for me of all the nations, for the whole earth is mine. You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Exod. 19:5-6)

Again, ritual holiness fosters a sense of distinctiveness, which, in turn, inculcates the recognition of a special ethical responsibility, a commitment of *noblesse oblige*.

What we would call the ritual and ethical dimensions of the covenant are thus correlative: the ritual promotes the ethical, and the ethical is the foundation and precondition of the ritual. How can the Jew pretend to fulfill the additional, special obligations of the Torah if he does not fulfill the basic ethical requirements expected of all people in the Noachide laws?

In the words of Judah Ha-Levi:

Would that you observed the laws observed by the smallest and least important communities, i.e., of justice, the good way, and acknowledging God's beneficence. For the divine laws cannot be complete until after the social and rational laws are complete. . . . If someone does not uphold these, how can he uphold the sacrifices, sabbath, circumcision, etc., which reason neither requires nor prohibits? These laws which distinguish Israel, are in addition to the rational ones, and through them they have the advantage of the divine power.⁴⁵

In fact, our very distinction between the ethical and ritual dimensions of the covenant is alien to biblical thought, which recognizes no such dichotomy. Throughout the Torah we find both kinds of commandments interspersed. They are equally commanded by God, and they are commanded together.

What cannot be over-emphasized here is that the ritual-ethical correlation in the covenant is not a later construct or interpretation, whether prophetic, rabbinic, or philosophical. It characterizes the covenant, going back to Abraham (who received both "ethical" imperatives and such "ritual" obligations as circumcision). The correlation is a fundamental feature of the most ritualistic documents in the Torah, in the book of Leviticus.

Leviticus, which epitomizes more than any other section of the Bible

THE CONCEPT OF THE CHOSEN PEOPLE : 143

Jewish concern for formal, ritual behavior, begins by describing various types of sacrifices to be offered on different occasions and for various offenses. Then, in Leviticus 5:20-26 (in Christian Bibles, Leviticus 6:1-7), the Torah cites for the first time the case of an offense against another person, and stipulates that the guilty party

shall repay the principal amount and add a fifth part to it. He shall pay it to its owner when he realizes his guilt. Then he shall bring to the priest, as his penalty to the Lord, a ram without blemish from the flock, or the equivalent, as a guilt offering.

In other words, the person could not bring his guilt offering to the Lord until he first compensated the person whom he had harmed, adding a twenty-percent penalty to the principal owed. Only then, when he had righted the ethical wrong, could he begin his ritual atonement before God.

The classical prophets of Israel have often been fundamentally misunderstood, by Jews and non-Jews alike, regarding their attitude toward ritual and the formal Temple cult. What the prophets opposed was not ritual *per se*; to the contrary, they consistently reaffirmed the need for ritual and the centrality of the Jerusalem Temple in Jewish religious life. What they opposed and sharply condemned was the perversion of ritual and the defilement of the sacred by separating what should be organically correlated, by engaging in the empty forms of ritual, devoid of any ethical content, as if the divine image can be enhanced while human dignity is assaulted.

The same principle, that the ethical dimension is the absolute precondition for the ritual dimension of life, is also basic to the rabbis' approach to religious behavior. In their discussion of the atonement rituals of Yom Kippur, they ruled that

Regarding transgressions between a person and God, Yom Kippur can atone. Regarding transgressions between a person and his fellow, Yom Kippur cannot atone, until he satisfies his fellow.⁴⁶

As in Leviticus, we see here that when the transgression is purely ritual, i.e., "between a person and God," and involves no other people, then the atonement is also ritual. However, when the transgression is in the ethical realm, i.e., "between a person and his fellow," then before there can be any ritual atonement, the transgressor must "satisfy (i.e., compensate) his fellow." The ethical atonement must precede, chronologically as well as logically, any ritual atonement. Without that ethical precondition, the ritual is worse than ineffectual; it is a type of magic, an attempt to force natural or divine powers to do our will, without any regard for natural causality or ethical consequences. By itself, ritual is like alchemy; it deludes us into thinking that we can change the baseness of our lives into something precious, that we have been refined,

whereas, in fact, we have not changed our ways at all.

6. Chosenness: Externally or Internally Directed

There are Jews today who, like their ancestors in the days of Moses or Isaiah, think that chosenness confers upon them some spiritual or other superiority over non-Jews, and that the ritual component of the covenant somehow exempts them from fulfilling their moral obligations to both Jews and non-Jews. Such abuse has led other Jews to reject the concept of the Chosen People on moral grounds.

Others, like Mordecai Kaplan (1881-1983), concluded that it is not only the abuse of the concept that renders it objectionable; the concept itself is objectionable. Kaplan regarded the notion that one nation is somehow closer to God than are others to be morally repugnant and theologically bankrupt, as well as fundamentally undemocratic and primitive.

It seems to me, however, that what is objectionable is not the concept of the Chosen People *per se*, but its externalization. As I understand the classical sources, and have attempted to present them here, chosenness is a concept properly directed internally rather than externally. Chosenness, thus understood, is not a comparative category, externally directed, to compare the Jews individually and collectively with other people and nations. Keep in mind, again, that even such an ardent nationalist as Judah Ha-Levi recognized, in all honesty, that Jews are, in fact, no better ethically and no more intelligent or wiser than any other people.⁴⁷

Rather, chosenness is internally directed. Chosenness does not mean that Jews are better than others. It challenges them to better themselves. It does not mean that they are better than other people, but that they should be better people.

The false notion that the Jewish people possess some unique claim to morality and truth, which would seem to have no basis in empirical fact or the literary sources, led some Jewish thinkers in the nineteenth century to advocate a "mission theory," both in the Reform movement and in the Neo-Orthodoxy of Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888). According to the "mission theory," Jews have a divine mission to go out and teach the rest of humanity the truth of ethical monotheism. This does not contradict what was said earlier about Judaism lacking a logical motive for promoting proselytism, because the mission here was to spread basic and universal ethical monotheism, not Judaism *per se*, with its additional requirements.

According to this "mission theory" of the Reformers and of their Neo-Orthodox opponent Hirsch, Jews should not seek a separate national Jewish life, nor the restoration of the Jewish people to Zion. The dispersion, rather than being seen as divine punishment ("on account of our sins were we exiled from our land," in the words of the prayer book), was seen positively, as opening up new fields for the Jewish mission.

THE CONCEPT OF THE CHOSEN PEOPLE : 145

This and other externally directed views of chosenness are epitomized by the phrase, *'or la-goyim*, “a light to the nations,” as if the Jews are in a position to enlighten the rest of the world.

Interestingly enough, however, this phrase, which one hears repeated so often that one might think it is found in the Torah or other biblical books, is not found anywhere in the Bible, and in a sense contradicts what the prophets understood Jewish chosenness to mean.

Jews have neither the right nor the ability to set themselves up as “a light to the nations.” What Isaiah challenges Israel to become is not *'or la-goyim* but *le-'or goyim*, “as a light of the nations.” Isaiah’s phrase (cf. Isa. 42:6-7 and 49:6) is not externally directed, that the Jews should be a light to the nations. It is an internally directed challenge: the Jews should conduct their own national life in the promised land of Zion in an exemplary manner, “as a light of the nations,” through a society that is based on justice and truth. Isaiah’s vision neither negates separate Jewish nationhood nor does it send the Jews out to enlighten the non-Jews. It calls for Jewish national life to be exemplary.

Chosenness, thus understood, demands that Jewish distinctiveness be internally directed, in fulfillment of the moral foundation and ethical goal of the Jewish people’s covenant with the God of Israel. In the words of Isaiah:

I the Lord have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and protected you; I have made you as a national covenant, as a light of the nations; To open blind eyes, to bring the prisoner out of the dungeon, and those who dwell in darkness out of prison. (Isa. 42:6-7)

I have made you as a light of the nations, to be my salvation to the end of the earth. (Isa. 49:6)

NOTES

1. In Romans 11, Paul employs the imagery of the native (i.e., Jewish) branches broken off of the olive tree, with alien (i.e., Gentile) branches grafted in their place. For interesting Christian and Jewish statements on *Verus Israel*, cf. *Disputation and Dialogue: Readings in the Jewish-Christian Encounter*, ed. Frank E. Talmage (New York, 1975), Part I.

2. Space does not permit citing, let alone explicating, the myriad texts, from the Bible on, asserting or referring to chosenness. The consistent theme, however, is that Israel’s covenantal obligations involve loyalty to God and observance of the Torah’s commandments. Only then does Israel qualify as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:5-6). Chosenness is thus explicitly correlated to the Torah. In the words of the liturgy, God “has chosen us from all the nations and has given us his Torah”; “You have chosen us from all the nations, you have loved us and desired us, you have raised us above all tongues and have sanctified us by your commandments; you have brought us close to you, our king, to serve you. . . .” The mutual obligations of the covenant are discussed below.

3. Cf. my article, “Christianity and Anti-Semitism: Some Reflections,” in *Forum on the Jewish People, Zionism and Israel*, No. 59, Summer 1986, pp. 53-64. Franz Rosenzweig (Germany, 1886-1929) argued that Christianity is the way for the pagans, but the Jewish people do not need “the way” because they are eternally “with” God. It is one thing for Christians to claim that theirs is the “one way” to God. It is something else for Jews to endorse that claim. I see no reason for Jews to recognize Christianity as the only legitimate or effective way to God for

146 : Judaism

non-Jews, to the exclusion of Islam and other religions.

4. Some argue that the term “fundamentalism,” as a Christian technical term, cannot properly be applied to other traditions, in this case Islam. I concede the technical point, but know of no better term to describe the phenomenon.

5. The term originally was linguistic, denoting a foreigner who did not speak Greek; later it took on the connotations of someone uncultured, uncivilized. In Psalm 114:1, the Hebrew term *lo'ez*, meaning a non-Hebrew speaker, is translated as *barbaros* in the Septuagint (and in the Vulgate following it). Interestingly, the Aramaic Targum also uses the Greek term here, whereas the Syriac Peshitta retains the Hebrew root.

6. Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (Baltimore, 1954), Book II, Ch. 4, pp. 117-119.

7. *Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento (Hae tibi erunt artes), pacisque imponere morem, Parcere subiectis et debellare superbos.*

8. Biblical references to Israel as God's son (*ben*) or first-born (*bekhor*) do not imply such a national claim of divine descent, which in any event would contradict the creation story and genealogies of Genesis. The reference in Exodus 4: 22 is clearly rhetorical. Moses is told by God to warn Pharaoh—a king claiming divine personal status—that if he does not release “my first-born son Israel,” then “I will kill your first-born son.” According to Martin Buber, “only an act of divine favor can be meant. For not only can God elevate a person to be His ‘son’ by an act of divine adoption (2 Sam. 7: 14; Ps. 2: 7), He can also make him His ‘first-born’ (Ps. 89:28), with special duties and privileges—and so likewise His people.” Cf. Martin Buber, “The Election of Israel: A Biblical Inquiry,” in *On the Bible: Eighteen Studies*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York, 1982), p. 84.

9. Woodrow Wilson, Address to Congress, April 2, 1917, asking for a declaration of war.

10. Exceptional periods, when Jews did have the power to control their neighbors, would include the united monarchy, in the time of David and Solomon, and during the time of the Second Temple, the reign of the Hasmonean ruler John Hyrcanus (134-104 B.C.E.). Judah Ha-Levi raises the question of whether Jewish meekness is a virtue assumed voluntarily, or whether, given the power, Jews would also kill. Cf. *The Kuzari* 1: 113-115.

11. Similarly, in the passage cited in note 10 (*Kuzari* 1:113-115) Ha-Levi argues that the Jews, in effect, practice what the Christians and Muslims (who wage wars) preach, namely, meekness. Jewish suffering is essentially voluntary, because by merely uttering a word Jews could escape persecution and convert to Christianity or Islam, whereas a convert to Judaism must undertake to observe all the rigorous responsibilities of Jewish law. For explications of Ha-Levi's theory, cf. my articles “Faith and Reason: The Controversy Over Philosophy,” in *Great Schisms in Jewish History*, ed. Raphael Jospe and Stanley Wagner (New York, 1981), pp. 73-117, and “Jewish Particularity from Ha-Levi to Kaplan: Implications for Defining Jewish Philosophy,” in *Go and Study: Essays and Studies in Honor of Alfred Jospe*, ed. Raphael Jospe and Samuel Fishman (New York, 1980), pp. 307-325, reissued in *Forum on the Jewish People, Zionism and Israel*, No. 46/47, Winter 1982, pp. 77-90, and “Teaching Judah Ha-Levi: Defining and Shattering Myths in Jewish Philosophy” (forthcoming).

12. Cf. Judah Ha-Levi, *Kuzari* 2:48 and 3:7. For Ha-Levi, the historic anomaly, i.e., that prophecy was limited to only certain people, cannot be explained by the rationalist view (of Sa'adia Ga'on, Rambam, and others) that prophecy is fundamentally a function of reason, since reason is universal. Although I agree with those who argue that Ha-Levi's racial theory is not racist as the term is currently understood (see, e.g., Lippman Bodoff, “Was Yehudah Halevi Racist?,” *JUDAISM*, Vol. 38, No. 2, Spring 1989, pp. 174-184), we cannot honestly deny that Ha-Levi's racist theory has the potential for racist misappropriation. See the next note.

13. A classic case of such misappropriation of Ha-Levi's theory may be found in the first chapter of the *Tanya* (“Teaching”) or the *Likkutei Amarim* (“Collected Sayings”) of Shneur Zalman of Lyady (1745-1813), founder of the Habad-Lubavitch movement of Hasidism.

14. Eloquent expressions of Afro-American frustrations in this regard may be found in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York, 1965) and Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York, 1968). Malcolm X (pp. 277-283), while obviously not sympathetic to Israel, expresses great interest in and surprising empathy for Zionism, and sharply condemns Jewish assimilation.

15. Cf. note 3.

16. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah* (Code of Law), Book of Knowledge, Laws of Repentance 3:5.

THE CONCEPT OF THE CHOSEN PEOPLE : 147

17. On the other hand, some of the instances of Jews excluded from the world to come, in rabbinic sources as well as in Maimonides' Code, are various heretical categories. Nevertheless, even in such instances, as with the biblical objection to idolatry, the question is whether the offense is primarily theoretical—heterodox belief *per se*—or practical, i.e., unacceptable behavior resulting from such heterodoxy. Maimonides' insistence on correct opinions as well as proper behavior is based on two philosophic considerations. First, he regarded the Torah as an ideal system of divine law leading to the ultimate human perfection, namely, that of the intellect, i.e., knowledge of the truth. For Maimonides, the Torah thus leads to *tikkun ha-nefesh*, the welfare of the soul, and not merely to *tikkun ha-guf*, the welfare of the body. Second, Maimonides' concept of immortality (i.e., "a portion in the world to come") is also intellectual, and follows the Aristotelian identity of the subject, act, and object of intellection in the actual intellect. I do not see how this scheme can be regarded as somehow analogous to "justification by faith" in Pauline Christianity, as some have suggested. For more on Maimonides' intellectualist scheme, cf. my article "Rejecting Moral Virtue as the Ultimate Human End," in *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions*, ed. William Brinner and Stephen Ricks (Brown Judaic Studies 110, Atlanta, 1986), pp. 185-204.

18. Tosefta, Sanhedrin 13:2, ed. M.S. Zuckerman and Saul Lieberman (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 434. Cf. Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 105a.

19. Cf. the reference to this issue in Ephraim E. Urbach's discussion of chosenness in *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem, 1979), Vol. 1, p. 543.

20. Consider the telling as well as beautiful words of Ruth to Naomi: "Do not ask me to abandon you, to turn away from you; for wherever you go, will I go, and wherever you lie down, will I lie down; your nation is my nation, and your God is my God" (Ruth 1:16). Had Ruth, the archetypal proselyte in Jewish tradition, not now been a member of the Jewish nation, then the God of Israel would not have been her God.

21. I am aware of diverse Christian opinions and interpretations on these matters, today and historically. I use the term "classical" to mean the majority or normative views over the centuries, in those churches which consider themselves "Orthodox" (such as the Western Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox communions), as well as in significant trends within modern Protestantism. It is obviously not the place of a non-Christian to determine which Christian opinions are "true" or "Orthodox," as opposed to "heterodox" or "heretical."

22. Cf. Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, trans. N. Goldhawk (New York, 1961), Foreword, p. 7. The point that 'emunah means "trust" was also made by Moses Mendelssohn. Cf. *Jerusalem and Other Jewish Writings*, trans. Alfred Jospe (New York, 1969), p. 71. See the discussion in my article, "Faith and Reason: The Controversy Over Philosophy," pp. 76-77.

23. It is precisely in this sense that the term 'emunah is used in the central daily prayer, the 'Amidah, where God is described as *mekayyem 'emunato li-shenei 'afar*, "fulfilling his fidelity to mortals." 'Emunah is thus often attributed to God. Cf. Psalms 92: 3.

24. Cf. Philippians 3:9 and Hebrews 10:37-38. Quotations from the New Testament are according to the Revised Standard Version.

25. Cf. Judges 20:16.

26. Interestingly, this is almost the identical language to that used in Genesis 3: 16, when God says to Eve: "Your desire is for your husband, and he will rule over you."

27. Mendelssohn, Letter to Prince Karl-Wilhelm, in *Jerusalem and Other Jewish Writings*, ed. Alfred Jospe, pp. 126-127. Cf. the translation by Eva Jospe, *Moses Mendelssohn: Selections From His Writings* (New York, 1975), pp. 116-117.

28. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah* (Code of Law), Book of Judges, Laws of Kings 8:11. Cf. Tosefta, 'Avodah Zarah 8:4, ed. Zuckerman and Lieberman, p. 473, and Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 56a.

29. Cf. the extensive treatment of the seven Noachide laws in David Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism: An Historical and Constructive Study of the Noahide Laws* (New York and Toronto, 1983). For a brief survey, cf. "Noachide Laws" in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 12:1189-1191. Maimonides' theory of the Noachide commandments is complicated by the fact that he requires not only that the non-Jew obey the seven commandments, but recognize them as being divine commandments which are taught in the Torah, rather than simply doing them on the basis of his reason and conscience. There are also textual difficulties in this critical passage, and it is not definitely clear whether Rambam stated that a person who accepts the Noachide commandments on the basis of rational decision or conscience "is not one of the righteous Gentiles nor (*ve-lo*) one of their

sages," a reading followed by many Jewish traditionalists based on the printed editions, or that such a person "is not one of the righteous Gentiles but rather ('ela) one of their sages," a reading justified by some manuscripts and followed by many in the academic community. Cf. Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides* (New Haven, 1980), p. 455.

30. Cf. the discussion of these issues in my article, "Christianity and Anti-Semitism: Some Reflections," pp. 53-64.

31. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah* (Code of Law), Book of Judges, Laws of Kings 8:10.

32. Mendelssohn, "Open Letter" to Johann Caspar Lavater, in *Jerusalem and Other Jewish Writings*, ed. Alfred Jospe, pp. 116-117. Cf. the translation by Eva Jospe in *Moses Mendelssohn: Selections From His Writings*, p. 134. Mendelssohn clearly saw himself here as following Maimonides' precedent. Rambam, however, would not have accepted Mendelssohn's categorization of the Noachide commandments as the "religion of nature and of reason," Cf. note 29, above.

33. David Novak, "The Election of Israel: Outline of a Philosophic Analysis," pp. 3 and 19.

34. Cf. notes 11 and 12.

35. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* I:63, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago, 1963), p. 153.

36. *Mishneh Torah* (Code of Law), Book of Knowledge, Laws of Idolatry 1:3.

37. Interestingly, the Torah does not provide any explicit rationale for God's choice of Abram (he was not yet Abraham). The bare existential fact is all that we are given, when God commands Abram to leave his homeland and to go "'to the country which I will show you" (Gen. 12:1), and in the reaffirmation of that choice in "the covenant between the pieces" (*berit bein ha-betarim*) in Genesis 15. Subsequently, God again reaffirms his covenant in order "to be your God and of your seed after you" (Gen. 17:8), but why Abraham and his progeny are more worthy than others of divine trust and choice is not explained. Although there is thus no explanation in Genesis as to why God chose Abram, we should not conclude that the covenant, once established, is devoid of purpose and meaning, as I attempt to show below: "I have known him, in order that he might command his children and his household after him, that they observe the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice" (Gen. 18:19). Therefore, it is through Abraham that "all of the nations of the earth will be blessed." The Midrash attempts to fill in where the biblical text is silent, and suggests that Abraham, from the very earliest age, recognized the absurdity of idolatry and acknowledged the one God. While obviously not suggesting that Abraham was a philosopher, the Midrash thus sets the stage for Rambam's interpretation. Cf. Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1955), Vol. 1, Ch. 5, pp. 183 ff. Also cf. Rashi's comment on Genesis 12:5 (based on *Midrash Genesis Rabbah* 39:14 and the Aramaic *Targum Onkelos* on this verse) that the verse means all the people whom Abraham converted in Haran. After the Exodus, the Israelites could regard the covenant with Abraham as an established historic fact, requiring no further explanation or justification, but obligating them to fulfill its conditions: "Now, if you obey me and observe my covenant, you will be a treasure for me of all the nations" (Exod. 19:5).

38. For the collected rabbinic statements in English translation, cf. Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1955), Vol. III, pp. 80-82.

39. Cf. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, Vol. 3, p. 92.

40. Thus, the national *tokhehah* (rebuke, warning, admonition) in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 promise dire punishment, but not total destruction, as a consequence of the failure to obey Israel's covenantal obligations. However, aside from general and perennial questions of theodicy, our generation must reevaluate our understanding of the meaning of the *tokhehah*. As Irving Greenberg has pointed out, in the Holocaust Jews suffered calamities far more horrifying and extensive than whatever the Torah threatens for disloyalty to the covenant, as a consequence of their or their parents' or even their grandparents' loyalty to it, by identifying, even however minimally, as Jews.

41. Cf. Martin Buber's interesting discussion of this in "The Election of Israel: A Biblical Inquiry," in *On the Bible: Eighteen Studies*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York, 1982), pp. 80-92.

42. Cf. Genesis 4:1.

43. Midrash Deuteronomy Rabba 2:4. For the collected rabbinic views in English translation, cf. Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, Vol. 2, pp. 225-242.

44. For example, cf. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* III:48.

45. Judah Ha-Levi, *Kuzari* 2:48. In the Hirschfeld translation, this passage is found on p. 112.

46. Mishnah Yoma, Ch. 8.

47. Cf. note 12.

Rationales for the Omission of Eschatology in the Bible

NOAH H. ROSENBLOOM

HAVING GAINED A SHORT RESPITE FROM PERSECUTION after the expulsion from Spain, Don Isaac Abravanel, after many arduous and turbulent years in the service of the Portuguese and Spanish sovereigns, settled in Monopoli, a small Italian town on the Adriatic Sea. He wished to devote himself, in his declining years, to write on philosophy, theology, and biblical exegesis, subjects dear to his heart, but which he had been compelled to neglect during his all-consuming diplomatic and financial career. As if to compensate for lost time, he worked assiduously and indefatigably, producing within a relative short period voluminous works on these subjects.

Abravanel's writings of this period, however, reflect a deeper motive than a mere intellectual pursuit. They are saturated with the grief, agony, tribulation, and desolation of his coreligionists on the Iberian peninsula. They reflect his sense of outrage over the injustice and humiliation of the persecutions, forcible conversions, fiendish torments, inquisitorial mortification, and the final banishment. On the other hand, his writings are permeated with the hope of imminent salvation. They are replete with words of encouragement, solemn promises, and good tidings that the Messiah is coming, thus lifting the spirits of the oppressed and despairing exiles. In addition to these works, Abravanel also wrote a comprehensive work on Jewish eschatology, a subject not frequently discussed in detail by Jewish scholars, which, however, in the context of the prevailing circumstances, assumed considerable importance in this period. In their propaganda to convince the Jews of the superiority of Christianity over Judaism, the Christian clerics endeavored to contrast the explicit promises for the immortality of the soul in Christianity with the absence of such a clear and unambiguous promise in Judaism. To counteract this corrosive challenge, Abravanel devoted a segment of his work on eschatology, *Zedek 'Olamim*, to this issue. The obvious meaning of this title is eternal justice, but the author may have intended by the plural form of the word, *'olamim*, to signify the balance of justice in both worlds, this world and the hereafter. Only by a total comprehensive view of justice, embracing both realms, can true divine justice be comprehended.

To Abravanel's chagrin, his little haven in Monopoli was invaded by the French armies of Charles VIII, who claimed the throne of Naples. The invaders caused enormous havoc and destruction in the Jewish quarter, vandalizing Abravanel's house and absconding with or destroying the completed manu-

NOAH H. ROSENBLOOM is *Professor Emeritus in Philosophy and Hebrew Literature at Yeshiva University.*

script, *Zedek 'Olamim*. Accustomed to persecutions and wanderings, Abravanel managed to survive and escape. Again he suffered material and financial losses, to which he had become reconciled. He, however, could not acquiesce to the loss of the manuscript.¹ In many of his works he continues to refer to it, and expresses his grief over its disappearance. Fortunately, Abravanel not infrequently reiterated some of his views in his writings and thus some of the ideas he had expressed in *Zedek 'Olamim* may still be reconstructed.

As previously mentioned, among the various issues that Abravanel dealt with in *Zedek 'Olamim* was the criticism leveled by Christian theologians in their disputes with Jews about the Torah's alleged mission of eschatology. The Torah does not address the questions concerning man's immortality, his destiny in an afterlife. Rewards and punishment in the Torah are exclusively of a material nature and are limited to man's existence on earth. The critics assert that Judaism is an inferior religion which cannot favorably compare with Christianity, whose eschatology is more elaborate and concerned with man's spiritual fate in the world-to-come. This criticism, attributable to Augustine, was echoed by Thomas Aquinas who declared: "The promises of temporal goods are contained in the Old Testament, for which it is called old; but the promise of eternal life belongs to the New Testament."² This deprecatory opinion was not only held by medieval theologians, but was also reiterated by Kant in the era of the Enlightenment: "Since no religion can be conceived of which involves no belief in a future life, Judaism, which when taken in its purity is seen to lack this belief, is not a religious faith at all."³

Jewish scholars have always been uncomfortable with, and apologetic about, the puzzling omission of immortality and the hereafter in the Torah. Thus, in the tenth century, Saadia evinces concern "should someone object, however, saying: 'But we did not find any explicit mention in the Torah of retribution anywhere else than in this world alone.'"⁴ This question, however, was neither hypothetical nor academic later in the medieval era, when Jewish scholars were compelled to defend their faith in public debates with Christian theologians. At times it became most agonizing and traumatic, endangering the life and the very existence of the Jewish community. Some scholars, like Hasdai Crescas, wrote some works that could have been used as handy manuals in refutation of this challenge.⁵ His disciple, Joseph Albo, a participant in the Tortosa disputation, tells of such a challenge by an opponent: "If we test the Torah of Moses in this way, we find it defective . . . for it says nothing about spiritual happiness, which is the purpose of man, but speaks only of material happiness. The teaching of Jesus, on the other hand, promises spiritual happiness and not material prosperity."⁶ Abravanel's contemporary, Isaac Arama, cites the argument of some sophisticated Christian theologians, which has an Augustinian-Thomistic ring. According to this argument, the Torah was merely a *Praeparatio Evangelica*, and its precepts qualified the observant only for material benefits. To receive spiritual rewards, it was imperative to transcend the confines of the Torah and

embrace the new dispensation. "The Torah was merely a preparation and prelude for its recipients, for the one which will follow after two thousand years of perfection by the Messiah, who will introduce a new Torah, so that this (old) one will be like *matter* and the second (new) one like *form*."⁷

Although Abravanel does not allude to any personal involvement in a theological dispute, he was undoubtedly aware of the issues under discussion. He was familiar with the writings and views of the most prominent Christian theologians, particularly Augustine, to whose main work, *The City of God*, he refers by its title.⁸ Similarly, he was acquainted with the arguments of Thomas Aquinas, whose work on the existence of angels he translated into Hebrew.⁹ Ostensibly, Abravanel was aware of their criticism of Judaism as well as that of their successors. It is, therefore, understandable that when Abravanel set out to write a comprehensive work on Jewish eschatology he would include a segment dealing with its spiritual aspect of reward and punishment as well as eternal life in the world-to-come. Regrettably, his manuscript, *Zedek 'Olamim*, was never retrieved, but, luckily, a brief summary of this issue is extant in his commentary on Leviticus, in connection with the biblical admonitions and promises which will accrue for the obedience or disobedience of the divine commandments.

Abravanel presents seven arguments, many of which were neither new nor original. He admits that they were advanced by his predecessors, and that about some of them he had reservations and even skepticism. In this summary, Abravanel does not explain why he presented some arguments which he may have viewed as dubious or feeble. It is possible that in *Zedek 'Olamim* he elaborated analytically on each argument. It is also possible to speculate that he wished to provide a variety of arguments to facilitate his readers in their agonizing encounters with their detractors. Regardless of motive, it is significant that he succinctly presented a series of arguments, many of which had served Jewish polemicists to ward off the assaults of their opponents. Viewed in the context of Jewish medieval thought, Abravanel's following seven arguments seem to constitute a comprehensive outline of an *apologia* concerning a major Christian challenge to Judaism and a malicious provocation to Jews.

a) Mutual Benefits or Privations Are Not Rewards or Punishments

The material rewards and corporeal punishments stated in the Torah do not constitute the ones meted out to the soul in the hereafter. According to the Talmud, no reward for a mitzvah is possible in this world.¹⁰ The Torah's omission of spiritual compensations and privations was deliberate, since it wished man to observe the commandments regardless of any ulterior considerations. Such an ideal for man's conduct was promulgated by Antigonos of Socho in the second century B.C.E., and preached by Jewish sages throughout the ages.

This rationale, however, failed to address an obvious question: In the ab-

sence of the actual spiritual rewards and punishments, reserved for the soul in the afterlife, why did the Torah mention the material ones, which are far less significant? Moreover, if the Torah's object was that man observe the commandments for their own sake, regardless of any considerations of reward, were material benefits or afflictions not a serious threat to influence man's conduct? Albo cites a rationalization that "The Torah made corporeal promises, so that when the people see that the corporeal promises are fulfilled they will, without doubt, also believe the spiritual ones that are mentioned only by allusion."¹¹ Abravanel was undoubtedly familiar with this argument, as well as with Albo's dismissal: "For how can the fulfillment of the corporeal promises be evidence for something which is not mentioned in the Torah at all?"¹²

A far more plausible rationale, according to Abravanel, is provided by Maimonides: The Torah merely intended to provide material conditions, favorable or unfavorable, which may aid or deter man's observance of the commandments. His righteous or iniquitous conduct will result in auspicious or calamitous events which will advance or hinder his pursuit of eternal life. Accordingly, God

promised us in the Torah, that if we observe its behests joyously and cheerfully, and continually meditate on its wisdom, He will remove from us the obstacles that hinder our observance, such as sickness, war, famine and other calamities; and He will bestow upon us all the material benefits that will strengthen our ability to fulfill the Law, such as plenty, peace, abundance of silver and gold. Thus we will have leisure to study wisdom and fulfill the commandments, and attain life in the world-to-come.¹³

b) Man's Cognitive Limitations

The Torah could not explicitly depict the spiritual rewards or the spiritual anguish designed for the soul in the world-to-come because, during his physical existence on earth, man is unable to conceive things which transcend his cognitive and empirical limitations inherent in sense perception. For the Torah to depict intelligibly the delights and the anguish affecting the soul in a disembodied state in an incomprehensible metaphysical realm is as futile as describing colors to the congenital blind. This simile echoes that of Maimonides, who had advanced such an argument about existential man's inability to conceive the realm of the spirit, which is beyond his experience and out of his ken of perception and cognitive ability.¹⁴ Considering the fact that the Torah was not designed for a select few who might discern the truth, though nebulous, that lies beyond man's earthly existence, but was for everyone, it was imperative to employ material and corporeal promises and admonitions.

It should be pointed out that Maimonides, his intellectualism notwithstanding, suggested that the Torah, when offered to the masses, ought to be presented not on its more profound level, which is only comprehensible to an elite group, but as an educational modality. It ought to elevate man's consciousness from the elementary, mundane, and sensual until he gradually perceives the

more subtle meaning, the real beyond the metaphor and allusion.¹⁵ Thus, Maimonides who endeavored to divest biblical terminology of its one-dimensional semantics, advocated presenting the Torah's promises of benefits and privations to the uneducated in a literal manner.

This pragmatic rationale is likewise cited by Albo without attributing it to Maimonides. Accordingly, "spiritual reward is a profound conception for the human mind to grasp, and, since the Torah was given to the masses of the people as well as to the wise, it was proper to promise corporeal reward which they can grasp and perceive. For, if the Torah had promised spiritual reward, which cannot be perceived by the senses nor imagined and conceived by their limited minds, they would not have believed it."¹⁶ Albo, however, is displeased with this rationale, pointing out that the Torah commands the affirmation of metaphysical and paralogical concepts like the incorporeality of God or the negation of anthropomorphism, abstract ideas which are no less comprehensible to the average man than spiritual rewards and punishments in the world-to-come. Nevertheless, "the Torah relies in this matter on the intelligence of the reader, so that the masses understand it literally and the wise interpret it in the true sense. This being so, the Torah should have mentioned spiritual rewards also, and everyone would understand it according to his powers and abilities."¹⁷

Abravanel, however, disagrees with Albo, and differentiates between the prohibition of anthropomorphism, which merely requires the negation of human characteristics to the Deity, and the excognition of an ethereal existence alien to human experience and thought.

c) The Soul Is Inherently Eternal

Neither immortality nor spiritual rewards and punishments had to be stated in the Torah, since eternity is inherent in the essence of the soul, and *ipso facto* its recompense and retribution are expected to be of a spiritual nature. The notion of the soul being inherently eternal harks back to Plato and had its adherents in medieval Jewish thought. According to Nahmanides and Crescas, not to mention the Cabbalists, the soul, having been imparted by God and being a simple, non-composite substance, is not subject to decomposition and disintegration.¹⁸

Albo nevertheless questions this alleged certitude concerning the immortality of man's soul, which sought to explicate the Torah's omission of immortality. He poses the question: Is immortality more natural and self-evident than free will or *creatio ex nihilo*? Yet, those concepts, incomprehensible and esoteric as they are, have been stated in the Torah. Moreover, since some scholars maintain that reward and punishment will eventually be meted out to a reunited soul and body, signifying the resurrection of a long-time decomposed body, this unique nature of reward and punishment should have been emphasized. This extraordinary phenomenon, which is neither natural or rational, should have found a conspicuous place in the Torah.¹⁹

Overlooking or ignoring Albo's question, Abravanel continues with the presentation of this argument, referring to Nahmanides' distinction between manifest miracles and concealed miracles, two categories of the divine governance of the world. The former are frequently contrary to the course of nature and even disruptive of its normal process. Due to their cataclysmic manifestations, they appear to be most impressive. The latter, however, seem to be in conformity with nature and, therefore, people are completely oblivious of their supernatural quality and miraculousness, and hence their significance, import, and divine message. Immortality and spiritual rewards and punishments in the afterlife, being non-empirical, belong to the concealed category, which may be presumptive at best. Material and corporeal recompense and retribution, on the other hand, belong to the manifest category and are, therefore, verifiable. That there may exist a causal relationship between religious-ethical conduct and consequences in the world-to-come may be conjectured, whereas that such conduct should impact on the natural process in this world seems unbelievable. Should, however, such a causal relationship be ascertained, it would be the most impressive of all, and attest to divine justice in both worlds. Consequently, the Torah conceals the eschatological aspect of the spiritual rewards and punishments, but accentuates the material and corporeal which will vividly and glaringly manifest themselves in nature and in life. Thus, for instance, the Torah promises a super-abundant harvest for the observance of the Sabbatical year, premature death for the consumption of certain forbidden foods, and destitution for failure to give tithe. Since such a relationship between cause and effect seems to defy nature and reason, its consummation will thus be more credible.

It should be pointed out that this argument was already advanced by Saadia, thus transforming a liability into an asset by proving the alleged deficiency of the Torah to attest to its superiority. According to Saadia, the Torah is "outspoken in regard to mundane retribution because reason does not point to its cogency, while it was terse in its explanation of the reward in the hereafter, relying on its being pointed out by reason."²⁰

In the conclusion of this argument, Abravanel again cites Nahmanides' statement that the Torah does contain allusions to immortality and the soul's fate in their hereafter. Such an allusion he finds, paradoxically, in the punishment of extirpation, in which the Torah stresses "*This soul* shall be cut off from before Me,"²¹ or "because he hath despised the word of the Lord and hath broken His commandment, *that soul* shall utterly be cut off from before Me,"²² indicating that only the soul [of this flagrant sinner] is subject to annihilation, whereas other souls are eternal.

d) Material Recompense and Retribution Concretize Divine Providence

This argument is similar, to some extent, to the previous one but not identical. According to this argument, the Torah, in emphasizing the mundane re-

wards and punishments, sought to demonstrate the ubiquitousness of the divine providence and His concern with every act of man. By fulfilling the promise stated in the Torah which can be witnessed, verified, and experienced on earth, rather than in a nebulous unknown realm in the hereafter, God's omnipotence and omnipresence will be affirmed. Such an awareness is of utmost importance since, in the course of history, it was either neglected or flagrantly denied. Not only was it not accepted by the ancient heathens, but it was likewise rejected by the sophisticated Aristotelians and their rationalistic successors. According to the latter, the First Cause is completely removed from the world, and unconcerned with man's deeds or misdeeds. There is no relationship between man's behavior and God's governance of the world. The Torah wished to cure this philosophical and psychological "malaise" by concretely exhibiting the prevailing divine providence. By pointing to a linkage between the observance or non-observance of the commandments and the ensuing consequences to nature and man in this world the belief in providence will be established.

This views harks back to Judah Ha-Levi, who, when chided by the Khazar king about the remarkable promises of Christianity in the hereafter, retorted sarcastically: "None of them are realized until after death."²³ The Torah, however, does not promise, "If you keep this law I will bring you after death into beautiful gardens and great pleasures."²⁴ It limits itself to events and experiences in the here and now, thus showing an inextricable bond between man's ethico-religious conduct and divine providence.

In this connection, we should note the argument employed by Albo, who, like Abravanel after him, compared the Torah to a physician who, in treating a patient, concentrates on curing the source of the malady first, confident that the ancillary maladies will likewise be cured. The Torah, too, aims to cure man of disbelief in divine providence in this world, hoping that belief in the hereafter will eventually follow.

e) Rationale in the Context of Historical Exigencies

The prominence given to the mundane rewards and punishments has to be considered in the context of the historical background of the generation of the Exodus. Brought up in an idolatrous milieu, where belief in the need of propitiating malevolent deities controlling nature was widespread, it was necessary for the Torah to counter such claims and re-educate the people. There was a need to assert categorically that heathen practices will not be tolerated in the Promised Land. On the contrary, such practices will cause misfortune, whereas the observance of the divine commandments will bring prosperity.

The kernel of this idea was already expressed by Saadia, who thought that the Israelites of that era were in need of a new orientation. They had "to become acquainted with the nature of the land of Palestine, toward which they were traveling. The Torah dwelt at length upon the description thereof, as well as the

effect of their obedience or disobedience of God's commandments upon its fertility."²⁵

The importance of the historical background is elaborated upon even more by Maimonides:

The idolatrous priests then preached to the people who met in the temples and taught them that by certain religious acts, rain would come down, the trees in the field would yield their fruit and the land would be fertile and inhabited....When these ideas spread, and were considered as true, God, in His great mercy for us, intended to remove this error from our minds, and to protect our bodies from trouble and, therefore, desired us to discontinue the practice of these useless actions, He gave us His Law through Moses, our teacher, who told us in the name of God that the worship of stars and other corporeal beings would effect that rain would cease, the land be waste...calamities would befall the people...and life would be shortened....But the abandonment of that worship and the return to the service of God would be the cause of the presence of rain, fertility of the ground, good times, health and length of life.²⁶

f) Experiencing the Nearness of the Divine in This Life

In was needless for the Torah to state spiritual rewards and punishments in the hereafter because the faithful and devout experience during their life the nearness of God, which constitutes the true reward. This view was expressed by Ha-Levi in the *Kuzari*, and was echoed by Nahmanides and R. Nissim Geronid, to mention but a few. According to Ha-Levi, individuals who lead a life of purity and sanctity actually experience the divine presence, which is "manifest proof to them and a clear and convincing sign of reward hereafter."²⁷ The reality of this extraordinary experience is termed by William James as "the reality of the unseen."²⁸ That person has a "feeling of being in a wider life than that of this world's selfish little interests; and a conviction not merely intellectual, but, as it were, sensible, of the existence of an Ideal Power."²⁹

In light of this explanation, the soul's destiny in the hereafter is greater in Judaism than in any other religion. In addition to the spiritual rewards, the Torah also promises material ones on this earth.

g) National and Individual Rewards and Punishments

The last argument, which Abravanel considers most plausible, maintains that the rewards and punishments in the Torah pertain to the entire nation and, therefore, had to be of a material nature. Thus, rain or drought, war or peace, prosperity or famine, affect the community, and no individual residing in it can escape its fate. If a community is virtuous, though an individual in its midst is not, he will participate in the blessings. Similarly, if a community is sinful, all inhabitants therein will suffer, regardless of the meritorious conduct of some individuals.

Notwithstanding the explicit promises for material rewards and punishments addressed to the entire nation, there are spiritual ones which affect individuals only. The righteous man in a wicked community will receive his due spiritual reward, although the other individuals in that community will be subject to punishment. Likewise, a sinner will be chastised spiritually although his righteous neighbors will enjoy spiritual bliss. "This is," says Ha-Levi, "how God governs the world. He reserves the reward of every individual for the world-to-come; but in this world He gives him the best compensation, granting salvation in contradiction to his neighbors."³⁰

As previously pointed out, Abravanel did not consider the above-mentioned arguments, except for the last one, as persuasive and satisfactory. Nevertheless, considering the theological assaults on Judaism by its opponents and the enfeeblement of its defenders, he presented all arguments, hoping that one of them would serve as a successful defense. Abravanel concludes with an epigrammatic verse from Deuteronomy: "The Lord will cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thee; they shall come out against thee *one* way, and shall flee before thee *seven* ways."³¹

NOTES

1. David Harari points out that this lost work was quoted by Isaac Lopez more than 200 years after Abravanel's death. "Some Lost Writings of Judah Abravanel [Isaac's son] (1465?-1535?). Found in the Works of Giordano Bruno (1548-1600)," *Shofar*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Spring 1992): 62, 85-6, citing Lopez's *Kur Mezaref Ha-Emunot V'Mareh Ha-Emet* (Metz, 1847), sec. II, Ch. 12, 19a, and B. Netanyahu's *Don Isaac Abravanel, Statesman and Philosopher* (Philadelphia, 1953), p. 288.

2. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I, II Q 91, Art 5 c.

3. Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, tr. Theodore Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York, 1960), p. 117.

4. Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, tr. Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven, 1951), Book IX, Ch. II.

5. Hisdai Crescas, *Sefer Bitul Iqqarei ha-Notzrim* (Ramat-Gan, 1990).

6. Joseph Albo, *Sefer ha-Iqqarim*, tr. Isaac Husik (Philadelphia, 1930), Book III, Ch. XXV.

7. Isaac Arama, *Aqedat Yitzhaq*, Gate LXX.

8. Isaac Abravanel, *Commentary on Genesis* II:23.

9. Moshe Almosnino, *Sefer Ma'ametz Koah* (Venice, 1588), p. 117 a.

10. Kiddushin 39b.

11. Albo, *op. cit.* Book IV, Ch. XXXIX

12. *Ibid.*

13. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot T'shuvah, IX: 1. Also in his *Commentary on the Mishnah Sanhedrin*. Ch. X.

14. Maimonides, *Commentary on the Mishnah*, *ibid.*

15. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot T'shuvah, Ch. X:5.

16. Albo, *loc. cit.*

17. Albo, *op.cit.*

18. Nahmanides, *Commentary on Leviticus*, XVIII:29; also *Kitvei Ramban*, Chavel, ed. (Jerusalem, 1982), Vol. I, pp. 184-185; Hisdai Crescas, *Or Hashem*, Klal II, Ch. I.

19. Albo, *loc. cit.*

158 : *Judaism*

20. Saadia, *op. cit.*
21. Leviticus 22:3
22. Numbers 25:31
23. Judah Ha-Levi, *The Kuzari*, tr. Hartwig Hirschfeld (New York, 1964), part I, para.
105. 24. *Ibid.*, para. 109.
25. Saadia, *op. cit.* Book IX Ch. II.
26. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, tr. M. Friedlander (Philadelphia, 1942), III,
- ch. XXX.
27. *The Kuzari*, Part I, para. 103.
28. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York, 1902), pp. 53-76.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
30. *The Kuzari*, Part III, para. 19.
31. Deuteronomy 28:7.

Malamud as Modern Midrash

DAVID J. ZUCKER

DESCRIBING HIS APPROACH TO WRITING SHORT fiction, Bernard Malamud once suggested that one needs “to say everything that must be said and to say it quickly, fleetingly, as though two people had met for a moment in a restaurant . . . and one had time only to tell the other they are both human, and here, and this story proves it.”¹ This kind of brief, but enlightening encounter could describe classical Midrash, the sermons or explications generally of biblical texts as written by the early rabbis. These midrashim were also limited in scope and content, and sought to convey a message about the human condition. Furthermore, the authors of those midrashim would easily resonate with another observation by Malamud when he explained that “writing must be true; it must have emotional depth; it must be imaginative. It must enflame, destroy, change the reader.”²

Yet, despite these similarities, can one really speak in one breath of Malamud and Midrash? Unlike modern fiction, the midrashim in their formative period two thousand years ago were clearly developed in an oral style. They were spoken, and imparted to the public in public sermons. They were “not designed principally for entertainment but have a strong and self-conscious didactic function.”³ Another difference would be that the midrashists of the rabbinic world “believed that the Bible provided the answer—if not explicitly, then implicitly to every contemporary problem.”⁴ Such a claim could not be made for most modern writers. In fact, Malamud himself once wrote that the “purpose of the writer is to keep civilization from destroying itself. But without preachment. Artists cannot be ministers. As soon as they attempt it, they destroy their artistry.”⁵

Malamud did not write exclusively for, much less about, the Jewish community. He once explained: “I am not consciously speaking to American Jews; I am speaking to anyone who reads my books.”⁶ Yet, he wrote with a love for Jews and Judaism. In the last published collection of his short stories he had written that, early on in his career, he realized that “I was glad I was [a Jew] . . . I would often be writing about Jews, in celebration and expiation.”⁷

DAVID J. ZUCKER is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Teikyo Loretto Heights University in Denver, Colorado.

With the exception of his final (and unfinished) novel, which was set in 19th-century America, Malamud's stories were centered in the twentieth century; he wrote in response to contemporary issues, and offered insights and answers. To the extent that this was so, his writing serves as a figurative parallel to the rabbis' use of midrash. They too were concerned with contemporary issues, and offered insights and answers, even though they often located their midrashim in the past.

Yet, even more than these outward similarities between Malamud and Midrash, this article shall show how Malamud often created a kind of midrash in his writing. He utilized figures from the Jewish past and recast them, reclothed them in modern dress. He lived true to his own eponymous self, for Malamud served as midrashic *melamed* (teacher). An analysis of several of his stories shows just how deeply he was indebted to the midrashic tradition.

Joseph Heinemann offers several characteristics for classical Aggadah (for the purposes of this article, the terms "Aggadah" and "Midrash" are used synonymously). His "three broad types" of aggadot are:

- 1) Aggadot that are inextricably related to the biblical narrative.
- 2) "Historical" aggadot which tell of post-biblical personalities and events.
- 3) "Ethical-didactic" aggadot which offer guidance and outline principles in the area of religious and ethical thought.⁸

Examples of all three of these categories can be found in Malamud's works.

1. Biblical Characters and Themes

JACOB AND RACHEL

The opening story of Malamud's earliest short-story collection, *The Magic Barrel*, is titled "The First Seven Years."⁹ Like all of his works, it can be read on a variety of levels, but one clear understanding is that this is a modern rewriting of the love *and seven years of service* of Jacob for Rachel. The key line is found in Genesis 29:20: "So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her." The biblical account is told from the point of view of the patriarch Jacob. Not so in this story, for the viewpoint is that of Feld (Malamud's stand-in for biblical Laban, Rachel's father). In broad outline, this is the tale of Feld the shoemaker, who five years earlier had suffered a debilitating heart condition. Married, with a fourteen-year-old daughter, it appeared as if he would have to close his business and the family would have to live on a pittance. Just at the moment of his deepest despair, an answer suddenly presents itself. A "Polish refugee, Sobel, appeared one night from the street and begged for work. . . . Though he confessed he knew

nothing of shoemaking, he said he was apt and would work for a very little if Feld taught him the trade.”¹⁰ Feld/Laban never thinks of Sobel as a future son-in-law until the issue comes to a head.

“Why do you think I worked so long for you?” Sobel cried. “For the stingy wages I sacrificed five years of my life so you could have to eat and drink and where to sleep?”

“Then for what?” shouted the shoemaker.

“For Miriam,” he blurted—“for her.”

[Feld is aghast, then angry, but finally he realizes that Sobel loves Miriam and she him.] “She is only nineteen,” Feld said brokenly. “This is too young yet to get married. Don’t ask her for two years more, till she is twenty-one, then you can talk to her.”¹¹

Throughout the story there are subtle hints presented that this is based on the biblical narrative. Just as Rachel is portrayed as “shapely and beautiful” (Gen. 29:17), so Miriam is described as “a very nice girl and also so pretty that everybody looks on her when she passes in the street. She is smart, always with a book.” In the Bible, Jacob had literally fled for his life, for Esau had wanted to kill him (Gen. 27:41-28:10). Sobel is a Holocaust refugee, “who had by the skin of his teeth escaped Hitler’s incinerators.”¹²

There are also elusive hints that Malamud was also reflecting rabbinic midrashim in this story. In “The First Seven Years,” Miriam is Feld’s only child. According to Midrash Genesis Rabbah 73.1, Laban was blessed with sons only after Jacob’s arrival. Likewise, according to the story, Feld is grieved because Sobel is virtually penniless, and he sees no hope for him. In Midrash Genesis Rabbah 70.14 Laban is very displeased that Jacob appears destitute.

JOB

In the same collection, *The Magic Barrel*, Malamud features a second biblically based modern midrash, “Angel Levine.”¹³ Readers familiar with the calamitous opening chapters of Job will immediately see the similarities to the opening paragraphs of this story. As a fire destroys Job’s livelihood (Job 1:16), so flames consume Manishevitz the tailor’s business; as Job’s children are suddenly killed (Job 1:18-19), so the tailor’s son is a war casualty and “his daughter, without so much a word of warning, married a lout and disappeared with him as off the face of the earth.” Both Job and Manishevitz are afflicted physically (Job 2:7—Manishevitz with excruciating backaches). As Job finds his condition manifestly unjust, so does Manishevitz. Job explains that he had not denied the words of the Holy One (Job 6:10), and the tailor found his troubles “ridiculous, unjust . . . because he had always been a religious man.” Further, as Job seeks an answer from God in chapter 7, so Manishevitz asks, “My dear God, sweetheart, did I deserve that this should happen to me?”¹⁴

The purpose of Satan in Job is to test the biblical hero and tempt him to curse God. In the Bible Job has three “friends” who argue with him and seek to have Job discredit God—or himself, for some unknown sin that he has committed. Malamud combines these in the figure of—Angel Levine. When first we meet Levine he is described as “a Negro . . . a large man, bonily built, with . . . very large feet.” He is dressed shabbily, in a dark suit. Though Levine explains that he is an angel, he also admits that he “cannot perform either miracles or near miracles, due to the fact that [he is] in a condition of probation.”¹⁵ Though he proposes to be of help, his actions would seem to belie this offer.

In Jewish legends, Satan is often described as appearing as a beggar or, indeed, in other disguises.¹⁶ Levine’s odd manner, his strange, shabby attire, his large feet (to disguise satanic hooves?), his being found in a honky-tonk bar in Harlem, lasciviously dancing with a prostitute, his sudden and brash offer to help the tailor, following the latter’s troubles—all these help to discredit the belief that he is a real angel, much less God’s messenger.

As the story develops, like his biblical counterpart, Manishevitz rails against God, but never denies the existence of the Creator of the universe. Surely it is not coincidental that, toward the end of Malamud’s short story, just as at the close of that biblical book, in each case the innocent, but afflicted, protagonist affirms his belief. The tailor Manishevitz sighed: “‘I think you are an angel from God.’ He said it in a broken voice, thinking, If you said it, it was said. If you believed it you must say it. If you believed, you believed.” The angel’s response is briefly described. “Levine burst into tears. ‘How you have humiliated me.’”¹⁷ One can easily imagine that biblical Satan may well have reached a similar conclusion when he failed to discredit his quarry. Finally, as the biblical Job is rewarded in the final chapter of that book with health, wealth, and family, so Manishevitz is rewarded at the close of the story.

ISAAC

If we have to speculate whether Malamud *consciously* was, or was not, drawing on biblical or midrashic figures in other of his works, in *God’s Grace*¹⁸ he clearly makes the connection for the reader in two ways. Firstly, in what serves as the “acknowledgments page” in this final full novel, he states specifically that he is indebted to the scholarship of Shalom Spiegel’s *The Last Trial*, which deals with various legends surrounding the “binding” (and near sacrifice) of Isaac, as recorded in Genesis 22. One of the alternate traditions that Spiegel writes about is the notion that Isaac was, indeed, sacrificed!¹⁹ Secondly, Malamud makes direct references to biblical texts, and to both midrashic and talmudic legends, as shall be noted below.

God’s Grace is Malamud’s most bizarre, pessimistic, and, at the same time, his most sustained “fantastic” book. Many of the characters are primates,

MALAMUD AS MODERN MIDRASH : 163

sapiens who speak. The story centers around Calvin Cohn, literally the last human on earth, for he is the sole survivor of a thermonuclear war.

While the Isaac-as-sacrifice theme pervades the novel, the first lines of *God's Grace* begin with a parody of the stately, rhythmic opening verses of Genesis. This is followed with material clearly based on the Noah and Flood narratives. The book starts out with these words:

This is that story
The heaving high seas were laden with scum
The dull sky glowed red
Dust and ashes drifted in the wind circling the earth
The burdened seas slanted this way, and that, flooding the scorched land under
a daylight moon
A black oily rain rained
No one was there.²⁰

Immediately following this, comes a paraphrasing of the Flood story, with Cohn-as-Noah. Cohn, a paleologist, has miraculously survived because at the time of the worldwide destruction he had been literally on the bottom of the ocean. The connections to Genesis 6-9 are fairly obvious. There, too, the fish in the seas survived. Consider also these lines: "Not long after dawn, a faded rainbow appeared in the soiled sky . . . the Flood abated . . . The waters receded. They had risen high enough to overwhelm the remnants of the human race; now were slowly ebbing."²¹

The Noah motif notwithstanding, Malamud's clear concern is the story of the '*akedah*, the Hebrew term for the "binding" of Isaac as recorded in Genesis, chapter 22. On several occasions in the novel, Cohn refers to both biblical texts and to midrashic legends surrounding Isaac.

The Talmud says that Satan pestered God to test Abraham's love for Him; and God, to test and prove that love, commanded Abraham to take his boy up to the mountain in Moriah and give him for a burnt offering to the Lord Himself.

This talmudic reference is found in the Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 89b), though a similar legend is recorded in Midrash Genesis Rabbah 55.4, but in this latter case the accusers are God's angels. A couple of pages later, Cohn explains about another "talmudic" legend which says that Isaac was taken by the Angel to the Garden of Eden to convalesce from the wound that Abraham had inflicted upon him.²²

The novel concludes with a chapter ironically entitled "God's Mercy," though there does not seem to be much mercy in this tale. Cohn now is Isaac in earnest. Like his biblical forebear, he is carrying the "split wood" (cf. Gen. 22:3, 6, 9) which will be the firewood for his own sacrifice. Cohn and Buz, one of the chimpanzees who, in this strange tale, has achieved superiority over Cohn, climb up the mountain. It is clear that Buz intends to sacrifice this last human

being on earth. On the way up the mountain they meet “a beggar” who “stretched forth his bony seven-fingered hand.” This strange encounter also seems to have its roots in the midrashic literature surrounding the binding of Isaac. As noted earlier, in Jewish legends Satan often is described as a beggar. According to Midrash Genesis Rabbah 56.4, Samael, a well-known wicked angel—and sometimes associated directly with Satan—meets Abraham and seeks to dissuade him from his task. When Samael cannot convince Abraham he turns to Isaac, but with as little success. The Malamud text does not mention Samael by name, but clues to his demonic nature are suggested by the strange aforementioned “bony seven-fingered hand” and the fact that when the beggar fails in his mission with Cohn, he suddenly disappears “in a cloud of mist.”²³

In the biblical text, on the climb up Mount Moriah, Isaac (innocently?) asks his father, “Where is the sheep for the offering?” and Abraham answers, “God will provide. . .” (Gen. 22:7-8). The Hebrew allows several interpretations. It could be simply that Abraham is saying, “Listen son, do not worry, God will provide the sheep.” Alternately, it could be that Abraham is speaking to himself. He says aloud to Isaac, “God will provide,” but in his own mind Abraham confronts the awful fact that the sacrifice really *is* to be his own child—“my son”! In the biblical and midrashic narratives, just as Isaac is to be sacrificed, a heavenly voice stops Abraham, and the Patriarch looks up and finds a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. In *God’s Grace*, the ending is not so sanguine.

Isaac’s question to his father is reflected in the story, but Malamud raises the stakes. Here Cohn turns to the chimpanzee, Buz, and poses a similar question, but the outcome is very different.

“Where’s this ram in the thicket?” asked Cohn with a bleat.

Buz wagged his finger at his dod [Dad].

Though he had known, Cohn turned icy cold. “Am I to be the burnt offering?”²⁴

Even some arcane midrashic material is picked up by Malamud. In *God’s Grace*, Buz “poured spices and myrrh into the smoke” of the altar. These are not capricious choices. In the biblical account, spices are not mentioned. In several rabbinic sources, however, Moriah (“ . . . go to the land of Moriah,” Gen. 22:2) is connected directly with the Hebrew word for myrrh—*mor*.²⁵ In addition, according to one of the legends surrounding the *‘akedah*, even before the knife touched Isaac’s throat, blood spurted forth. This image is clearly stated in *God’s Grace*: “Blood, to their astonishment, spurted forth an instant before the knife touched Cohn’s flesh.”²⁶ There is a further connection with midrashic legend in *God’s Grace*, with Cohn being cast earlier as a latter-day Noah, for according to the Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer (Chapter 31),²⁷ the self-same altar which Noah and his sons used *after the Flood* was the one which was used by Abraham, ten generations later.

2. Post-Biblical Characters

ELIJAH LEGENDS

According to Jewish legend, the prophet Elijah not only never died but was transported to heaven in a fiery chariot. He continues to play an important role in the everyday life of the Jewish people. He is best known for his appearance at the Passover Seder, where there is a cup set aside for him, but Elijah is also present at every circumcision where traditionally there is a “chair of Elijah.” In addition to these functions, Elijah has often been portrayed as someone who reappears, often in disguise, and helps the poor and the righteous.²⁸ Malamud utilized the Elijah theme in at least a couple of his stories, the aforementioned “Angel Levine” and, again, in “The Silver Crown.”²⁹

The prophet’s ability to save lives was already attested to in the Bible in 1 Kings 17:17 ff. It is also in the Bible that one finds the image of Elijah ascending to heaven (2 Kings 2:11). While, as suggested above, the self-proclaimed Negro Angel, Alexander Levine, can be understood as Satan—the instigator for Job’s troubles—another viable reading of this character shows him as the legendary Elijah, who often visits old, sick, destitute couples in their homes. This paradigm certainly fits the Manishevitz family, for the tailor himself (as we have seen above) has suffered numerous physical ailments, and his wife, Fanny, is suffering from an advanced case of hardening of the arteries. Angel Levine offers to be of help, but Manishevitz refuses to believe that he *really* is an angel until, as we have seen toward the end of the story, he feels that he has no other options. In the concluding paragraphs, it appears as if Levine is indeed being transported back to heaven. Manishevitz “heard an odd noise, as though of a whirring of wings, and . . . [he] could have sworn he saw a dark figure borne aloft on a pair of magnificent black wings.”³⁰ In 2 Kings 2, just before he is transported to heaven, Elijah asks his disciple Elisha what final act the former can do for him. Elisha asks for a portion of his mentor’s spirit. Elijah replies that this will be so only if Elisha sees him when he is taken away (which, of course, is what happens.) Similarly, Manishevitz’s wish for Fanny’s health is granted *after* he sees the figure “borne aloft.” In the story, as noted before, Alexander Levine is found in a honky-tonk with what appears to be a prostitute. In one talmudic legend, Elijah, that master of disguises, appears as a harlot (!) in order to effect the escape of a rabbi from the Roman authorities.³¹

In “The Silver Crown,” which has been analyzed as a negative mirror image of “Angel Levine,” the protagonist, Albert Gans, refuses to believe in the possibility of the miracle performed by a “wonder-worker,” and, consequently, he is denied his request.³²

THE ANGELOF DEATH

Death is our common lot. When a person’s time on earth is completed,

rabbinic tradition indicated that the Angel of Death comes to take him or her away. There is no way that this could be avoided, but, in rare exceptions, the fatal day could be postponed.

Most contemporary writers would shy away from this notion of a physical Angel of Death. The image is too anthropomorphic. Yet, death continues to be a matter of concern. We question the timing of death, if not its actual necessity. If we could “cheat” death, or postpone dying, would not that be the choice of most people? To cheat death, or at least to buy some extra time, is exactly the intention of the old man, Mendel, in Bernard Malamud’s wonderful and intriguing short story “Idiots First,” which appeared in the collection *Idiots First*.³³

In “Idiots First” we read of Mendel and his mentally retarded son, Isaac. Mendel believes that he has seen Death coming for him, and prior to his demise he wants to send his son off to his uncle in California. The story is set in New York City, and as it unfolds we see Mendel and Isaac running from pillar to post, seeking to find enough money for the cross-country train ticket. Whether it is at the pawnshop, at the home of a rabbi, in the presence of a supposed philanthropist, or an all-night diner, they are continually being pursued by a shadowy figure.

As in the rabbinic literature, Death is often designated by a name, so in this short story, “Idiots First,” he also has a name. Here he is called Ginzburg. At times it is unclear whether it is Mendel or the son who really is the Angel’s quarry. Though Mendel is described as “the dying man,” he also warns his son that he should be very cautious.³⁴ As Mendel explains, “Ginzburg . . . came to see me yesterday . . . the one, with the black whiskers. Don’t talk to him or go with him if he asks you.” As an afterthought, Mendel reflects, “Young people he don’t bother so much.”³⁵ Is this Ginzburg of the story really the Angel of Death? Is this what Malamud wants the reader to understand? The inescapable answer is yes. In rabbinic literature Death can change his appearance to suit the situation. In addition, as has been shown, at times his mission can be put off, at least for a limited period of time.³⁶

In this short story, the figure of Ginzburg continues to hover at the edge of one scene after another, seemingly changing shape and coloration as the story proceeds. As he moves from image to image, he always retains some of his past physical characteristics. At first he has “black whiskers,” then, as the unsympathetic pawnbroker, he is “red-bearded,” with black horn-rimmed glasses, and is described as eating a “whitefish.” The indifferent philanthropist is “paunchy,” and has “hairy” nostrils. He inquires about the idiot son with exactly the same words as did the pawnbroker. The shadow-like figure in the park is “bearded,” and in the restaurant he is “heavy-set.” Finally, at the train station, the ticket collector is an amalgam of the descriptions that had been seen heretofore, for the ticket collector is “a bulky, bearded man with hairy nostrils and a fishy smell.”³⁷

There is another reason to conclude that Malamud was retelling an ancient

tale about Samael, the Angel of Death. In broad outline, “Idiots First” is the tale of an old man, an adult son named Isaac who seems unable to protect himself, and the seeming inevitability of death. Though the focus is on Isaac in *God’s Grace* and the matter is played out differently as seen above, that story also featured a Samael figure.

According to rabbinic thought, death may be postponed but, in the end, it is inevitable. This, too, is reflected in Malamud’s wonderful story. In the midrashic literature we find the story of Rabbi Simeon bar Halafta, who late one night was returning home. On the road he encountered someone who, it becomes clear, is none other than the Angel of Death. The rabbi enquired of this character who he was, and the latter replied that he was God’s messenger. “Why is it that you look so strange,” the rabbi continued. On account of the talk of human beings who say “this and that we will do,” and yet not one of them knows when he will be summoned to die, was the answer. When Rabbi Simeon asks to be told the date of his own death, the Angel explains that he does not have jurisdiction over righteous people. The midrash then supports this statement with this quotation from Proverbs 10:27, “The fear of the Lord prolongs life.”³⁸ Though death may be postponed, yet none will escape this end.

As in the midrash which pictured Rabbi Simeon bar Halafta and the Angel of Death in conversation, at the conclusion of Malamud’s short story Mendel turns to Ginzburg and asks him outright: “What then is your responsibility?” Ginzburg, the Angel of Death, replies that his role is “To create conditions. To make happen what happens. I ain’t in the anthropomorphic business.” When Mendel then asks about “pity,” Ginzburg replies, “This ain’t my commodity. The law is the law. . . . The cosmic universal law, goddamit, the one I got to follow myself.”³⁹

Ginzburg’s remark sounds very much like the midrashic statement supporting 1 Chronicles 29:15 (“Our days on earth are as a shadow, with nothing in prospect”), where the rabbis explain: “None can hope to escape death; all know it and affirm it with their own mouths that they will die.”⁴⁰

3. Ethical-Didactic Themes

While the Talmud is filled with many ethical maxims, there is one section which stands out. This is the set of chapters known as the “Ethics of the Ancestors” (in Hebrew, *Pirke Avot*—literally, “Chapters of the Fathers,” and sometimes translated as the “Sayings of the Fathers”). To illustrate Heinemann’s third category of “ethical-didactic” items, the Ethics of the Ancestors provides several examples.

“Do not separate yourself from the community.”

Being part of the community, consciously associating with fellow Jews, is one of the maxims in *Pirke Avot* (2:4), attributed to the sage Hillel. In “The Lady

of the Lake,”⁴¹ one of Malamud’s earlier stories, we find the exemplary tale of Henry Levin, a New Yorker who decides to spend some time in Europe in search of romance. When in Paris, he decides to call himself by another name. He “was tired of the past—tired of the limitations it had imposed upon him,” so he chooses the deliciously ironic name of Henry R. Freeman.⁴² As the story develops, Henry comes face to face with his past, and finds that he is not a “free man” at all. Indeed, he has become the prisoner of his own choice. When in Italy, he meets a mysterious, lovely, and beautiful young woman who calls herself Isabella Del Dongo. After some time together, she asks him directly, though hesitantly, “Are you, perhaps, Jewish?” Though shocked at the question, he knew in some way that it was not unexpected. “Yet he did not look Jewish, could pass as not—had. So without batting an eyelash, he said, no, he wasn’t. And a moment later added, though he personally had nothing against them.”⁴³ Later Isabella even asks him if some peaks do not look like a menorah, but he pretends not to understand the term.

At the conclusion of the story she asks one final time, and again he denies his religious heritage, damning himself in the process. Isabella then slowly

unbuttoned her bodice. . . . When she revealed her breasts . . . to his horror he discerned tattooed on the soft and tender flesh a bluish line of distorted numbers. “Buchenwald,” Isabella said, “when I was a little girl. The Fascists sent us there. The Nazis did it . . . I can’t marry you. We are Jews. My past is meaningful to me. I treasure what I suffered for.”⁴⁴

“In a place where there are no decent people, strive to be one.”

“Judge all people in the scale of merit.”

“A good heart.”

Another saying of Hillel’s was to “strive to be a decent person,” especially in a society which lacked many such role models (*Pirke Avot* 2.5). That saying, in Malamud’s writing, often seems joined with his basic faith in the essential goodness of humankind, a thought that was voiced in another statement in the Ethics of the Ancestors, credited to Nittai of Arbel: “Judge all people charitably” (*Pirke Avot* 1.6). Close to both of these ideas was a third maxim, that of Elazar ben Arakh. When asked by his mentor what was most essential for civilized life, he replied, “a good heart” (*Pirke Avot* 2.9).

Though one could choose many Malamud characters who exemplify these characteristics, three will suffice: Oskar Gassner, Morris Bober, and Sy Levin. Gassner is the protagonist in “The German Refugee,” and Bober is a central character in the early novel, *The Assistant*.⁴⁵

In 1939, Oskar Gassner is a refugee, a former Berlin critic and journalist now living in New York, and is trying desperately, literally and figuratively, to find his

voice in English. He speaks with a thick German accent, and is traumatized by what he has seen and experienced. He explains: "I have lozt faith. I do not—not longer pozzezz my former value of myself. In my life there has been too much illusion. . . . Confidenze I have not. For this and alzo whatever elze I have lozt I thank the Nazis."⁴⁶

Still, encouraged by his tutor, Gassner struggles on and, at the end of that awful summer of 1939, when Germany had invaded Poland and the war was underway, he gives his long-awaited public lecture. In it, he quotes the hopeful lines of Walt Whitman:

*And I know the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my
sisters and lovers,
And that the kelson of creation is love. . . .*⁴⁷

This kind of hope in the face of despair is reminiscent of Morris Bober, the down-in-luck grocer whose story is told in *The Assistant*. At one point Bober tells Frank Alpine what it means to be a Jew and, by extension, about what it means to be a decent human being. Bober explains: "My father used to say to be a Jew all you need is a good heart." He then goes on to elaborate, "This means to do what is right, to be honest, to be good. This means to other people. Our life is hard enough. Why should we hurt somebody else? For everybody should be the best, not only for you or me. . . . This is what a Jew believes."⁴⁸

Malamud did not close his eyes to reality. He knew that the world could be brutal and cruel. Both Gassner and Bober die at the end of these respective stories. Their striving, the message of their inherent hope in humanity, however, triumphs over their deaths. As the rabbi who eulogizes him explains:

Morris Bober was to me a true Jew because he lived in the Jewish experience, which he remembered, and with the Jewish heart . . . he was true to the spirit of our life—to want for others that which he wants also for himself. . . . He suffered, he endured, but with hope.⁴⁹

Sy Levin is the protagonist of Malamud's novel, *A New Life*. Like so many Malamud characters, Levin struggles, he wrestles with his life. A college professor, he ponders questions of morality, and we are privy to some of his musings. As noted earlier, Malamud had written that the "purpose of a writer is to keep civilization from destroying itself. But without preachment." Some of Levin's thoughts would seem to echo the teachings of the rabbis. In one soliloquy spoken to himself, Levin suggests that

As you valued men's lives yours received value. . . . That, if not entirely true, ought to be. . . . We must protect the human, the good, the innocent. Those who had discovered their own moral courage, or created it, must join others who are moral; these must lead, without fanaticism.⁵⁰

Conclusion

To endure, but with hope, to know that the kelson of creation is love, to do what is right, to be honest and good, to protect the human, the good, the innocent—this was Malamud's message: to live with the Jewish heart. Malamud wrote as a Jew, often incorporating in his works images from the past, including not only biblical themes, but the midrashic and ethical interpretations of the rabbis. He blended these into his own writing, changing and developing where he felt the need. As he had written in one of his novels, "the past hides but is present."⁵¹

Bernard Malamud's writing was true, it had emotional depth, it was imaginative. It had the ability to enflame, destroy, and change his readers. He had a vision for humankind which was expressed through his works. With the exception of "The Lady of the Lake," all of the short stories quoted in this article appeared in his final collection, *The Stories of Bernard Malamud*. It is likely, therefore, that many of those themes represented for him the quintessence of his writing.

"It is life that makes one a Jew." So Italo Svevo. Elie Wiesel amplified the thought when he said, "At one point or another, every person becomes Jewish—the moment he becomes authentic he genuinely—though metaphorically—becomes Jewish. And every Jew is universal the moment he is genuine."⁵² Bernard Malamud left us a wonderful legacy, a universal and genuine message which reflected the richness of the biblical and midrashic past. He honored his heritage in many ways, and it continues to live and echo through his works.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Granville Hicks, "His Hopes on the Human Heart," in *Saturday Review*, October 12, 1963:32.

2. Malamud, quoted in Dean Cadle, "Bernard Malamud," *Wilson Library Bulletin*, Vol. XXXIII (Dec. 1958): 266.

3. Heinemann, Joseph, "The Nature of Aggadah," trans. Marc Bregman, in Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budi (eds.), *Midrash and Literature* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 47.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

5. Malamud, quoted in Cadle, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

6. Communication from Bernard Malamud to the author, January 21, 1969.

7. Bernard Malamud, *The Stories of Bernard Malamud* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983), p. ix.

8. Heinemann, *op. cit.*, p. 43. Heinemann further explained that "neither the names nor the boundaries of these categories are entirely fixed," and that there is some necessary fluidity between these categories.

9. "The First Seven Years," in Bernard Malamud, *The Magic Barrel* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1958), pp. 3-16.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

MALAMUD AS MODERN MIDRASH : 171

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.
12. *Ibid.* pp. 5, 15.
13. Bernard Malamud, "Angel Levine," in *The Magic Barrel*, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-56.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44. Malamud would return to the Job theme in *God's Grace*; see below, note 21.
15. *Ibid.* pp. 45, 47.
16. Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1908-1938), vol. 5, p. 248, n. 226; see also vol. 6, p. 418, "Satan, the guises assumed by."
17. *Ibid.* p. 55.
18. Bernard Malamud, *God's Grace* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982).
19. Shalom Spiegel, *The Last Trial: On the Legends and Lore of the Command to Abraham to Offer Isaac as a Sacrifice: The Akeda*, translated and introduction by Judah Goldin (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1967), pp. 3-8, 30, *ad. loc.*
20. Malamud, *God's Grace*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
21. *Ibid.* p. 7. Though he does not do so extensively, Malamud also features Cohn-as-Job when this-latter day lonely man argues with his Creator. Cohn and God both make reference to Job and Malamud paraphrases some of the themes found in Chapters 38-41 of Job, where God answers Job out of the whirlwind (*God's Grace*, *op. cit.* pp. 136-137).
22. *Ibid.* pp. 72, 74. The legend about Isaac being taken to the Garden of Eden comes from the *Midrash Ha-Gadol* to Genesis 22:19, not the Talmud. See Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 285-286, and Spiegel, *op. cit.* p. 7, n.18.
23. Malamud, *God's Grace*, *op. cit.*, pp. 221-222. See also *Pesikta Rabbati* 40.6; *Tanhuma Vayera* to Genesis 22.6. The beggar's "bony" hand reminds one that Angel Levine was described as being "bonily built."
24. Malamud, *God's Grace*, *op. cit.*, p. 222.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 223. See *Midrash Genesis Rabbah* 55.7; *Midrash Song of Songs Rabbah* 4.6.2; *Targum Onkelos* to Genesis 22:2; *Rashi* to Genesis 22:2.
26. Malamud, *God's Grace*, *op. cit.*, p. 223. See Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (Cleveland and New York: World; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1961), p. 258; Louis Ginzberg, *op. cit.*, vol. 6, p. 204.
27. *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, translated and annotated by Gerald Friedlander (New York: Sepher-Hermon, 1981), p. 227. See also *Midrash Ha-Gadol* to Genesis 22:9.
28. David Goldstein, *Jewish Folklore and Legend* (London and New York: Hamlyn, 1980), pp. 158-165. See also the entries "Elijah" in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* and the *Encyclopedia Judaica*.
29. Bernard Malamud, "The Silver Crown" in *Rembrandt's Hat* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1973), pp. 3-29.
30. Malamud, "Angel Levine," *op. cit.*, p. 56.
31. B. Avodah Zara 18b.
32. For a fuller discussion of both "Angel Levine" and "The Silver Crown" in a somewhat different context, see my article, "Strangers, Angels and Redemption: Jewish/Christian Images in Two Malamud Stories" in *Conservative Judaism*, Vol. 37 (3) (Spring 1984): 43-50. In the rabbinic literature, Elijah is presented not only as one who helps; he also is someone who demands high standards of action. See B. Berakhot 6b and Louis Ginzberg, *op. cit.*, Vol. 4, pp. 211 ff.
33. "Idiot's First," in *Idiot's First* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1963), pp. 3-15.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
36. B. Moed Katan 28a; *Midrash Numbers Rabbah* 16.24; *Midrash Deuteronomy Rabbah* 11.10; Louis Ginzberg, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, pp. 227-229.
37. Malamud, "Idiot's First," *ibid.*, pp. 4, 5, 7, 9, 13.
38. *Midrash Deuteronomy Rabbah* 9.1 (see 9.3), as well as *Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 3.2.3.
39. Malamud, "Idiot's First" *op. cit.*, p. 13.
40. *Midrash Genesis Rabbah*, 96.2.
41. Bernard Malamud, "The Lady of the Lake," in *The Magic Barrel*, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-133.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

172 : *Judaism*

43. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
45. Malamud, "The German Refugee," in *Idiot's First*, *op. cit.*, pp. 195-212; *The Assistant* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1957).
46. Malamud, "The German Refugee," *op. cit.*, pp. 206, 207.
47. Malamud, "The German Refugee," *ibid.*, p. 211. Walt Whitman's statement is reflected in a quotation from an earlier Malamud novel where the chief character says "The source of freedom is the human spirit." *A New Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1961), p. 202.
48. Malamud, *The Assistant*, *op. cit.*, p. 124.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 229.
50. Malamud, *A New Life*, *op. cit.*, p. 258.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
52. Quoted in Pamela White Hadas, *In Light of Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1980), p. x. There the author explains that the Weisel quote comes from Harry Cargas's *Conversations with Elie Wiesel*.

Shylock and the Struggle for Closure

JOHN PICKER

1. "Go presently inquire, and so will I/Where money is": Theoretical and Historical Considerations

IN HIS SEMINAL WORK ON SHAKESPEAREAN FESTIVE comedy, C. L. Barber introduces a theory of comic form which attempts to account for the role of figures such as Shylock in the early plays. Emphasizing the connection between theatrical practices and social customs such as May Day and the Winter Revels, Barber argues that the early comedies celebrate natural vitality and social identity. He considers the underlying movement of Shakespearean comedy to be the passage "through release to clarification," that is, from revel and celebration to the formation of a durable communal bond. According to Barber, Shakespearean comedy requires integration and closure such that any marginal figures, or "butts," as Barber refers to them, must be restrained and expelled by society. By defeating such challenges, the society gains strength and, finally, reestablishes itself.¹ The presence of a threatening figure thus enables disparate groups to come together as a community, and overpower a common scapegoat. Yet, as Barber writes, "behind the laughter at the butts, there is always a sense of solidarity about pleasure, a communion embracing the merrymakers to the play and the audience."² Barber's theory of festive comedy, then, contains the underlying paradox that a welcoming community can be established only through ridicule and ostracism.

This essay examines how characters in *The Merchant of Venice* attempt to silence, ignore, interrupt, and otherwise stifle Shylock; at the same time, it demonstrates how Shylock's voice and personality undercut their attempts, to the extent that his presence informs a reading of the play. In what follows, I will argue that Shylock thwarts society's attempts to contain him. I would like to suggest that in *Merchant*, Shakespeare poses two similar questions, one focusing on historical circumstances, and the other dealing with issues of genre: just how can Venice's and Belmont's citizens reconcile the need for Shylock's money with the fact that they shun him socially? And secondly, how can the play reconcile its need for Shylock's threatening presence with the fact that it ultimately expels him from comic closure? By allowing Shylock to undermine closure, Shakespeare unites these historical and generic concerns, and exposes the paradoxical principle upon which his comedy and his society operate: the formation of communal identity through exclusionary practices.

Although Edward I expelled the majority of Jews from his kingdom in 1290, Jewish stereotypes continued to flourish in England throughout the Middle

JOHN PICKER is a graduate student in English at the University of Virginia.

Ages and Renaissance. Elizabethans encountered few Jews in the city and countryside, yet Church sermons nevertheless proclaimed Jews to be “hard-hearted blasphemers who were also vain, ostentatious, and deceitful,” and encouraged the association of the “devil Jew” with avarice.³ The tradition of connecting Jews with cupidity had originated virtually as they arrived on European soil, and with good reason: moneylending was one of the few professions that European Jews were permitted to practice. As Cecil Roth writes, the “practice of usury was considered to be a sin for any man, but seemed in Gentile eyes to be less so for Jews, who had so many [sins] on their infidel consciences that one more or less hardly mattered.”⁴ While Christians considered usury sacrilegious, they did not hesitate to request extensive loans from Jews in order to conduct trading ventures and appease belligerent enemies. And, lacking the relatively modern invention of state-sponsored welfare programs, many Italian city governments depended upon Jewish usurers to support the poor by opening “loan banks.” Jewish money thus represented a powerful force governing the sustenance, expansion, and protection of Christian societies.⁵

Yet, Renaissance Europe denied Jews the freedom to inhabit the same communities as Christians. In the words of Bernard Glassman, “there was the need for the Jew’s services on the one hand, and the contempt for his person, on the other.”⁶ Christians welcomed Jewish money, and often *required* it, so long as accepting it did not necessitate welcoming the Jewish moneylender. Venice, the most important trading city in Italy, established the first ghetto in Western history for its substantial Jewish population. Because Venetian merchants relied heavily on usurers to finance business ventures, Jews who sought business flocked to the city. In 1516, however, the threat of a burgeoning Jewish population drove the Venetian government to legislate the confinement of Jews to a specified district. This was the New Foundry, or *geto nuovo*, from which the word “ghetto” originated.⁷ Within the *geto nuovo*, Jewish heterodoxy was kept safely away from Christian homes, while, in the marketplace or *piazza*, those same Christians coveted loans from Jewish usurers. Hence, the very layout of Venice reproduced the Christians’ paradoxical desire to embrace desperately needed Jewish money and simultaneously shun the Jews who possessed it.

There is a striking parallel between the bind in which Jewish usurers were placed by their Christian debtors, and the place of marginal figures in the model of Shakespearean comedy as expressed by C. L. Barber. As Jewish usurers were required to finance the growth of Renaissance European communities, so threatening figures must be present for communal growth to occur in Shakespeare’s comedies. And, paradoxically, just as those Jews were socially ostracized by the societies that they financed, so the community that the outsider helped to construct had to expel him or her in order to reach closure. Throughout *Merchant*, Shakespeare dramatizes this paradox by allowing Shylock consistently to challenge the restraints of the Venetian community and, finally, by permitting him to undermine comic closure.

**2. "I am not bound to please thee with my answers":
Shylock's Containment Challenged**

We are introduced to Shylock through a series of abrupt, grating conversations which feature his refusal to be manipulated and ostracized. In his first scene, Bassanio makes him acutely aware of his marginal status by approaching him solely to take out a loan of three thousand ducats. Shylock shows his resentment toward this treatment by manipulating their dialogue in fascinating ways:

SHYLOCK: Three thousand ducats—well.

BASSANIO: Ay, sir, for three months.

SHYLOCK: For three months—well.

BASSANIO: For the which, as I told you, Antonio shall be bound.

SHYLOCK: Antonio shall become bound—well.

BASSANIO: May you stead me? Will you pleasure me? Shall I know your answer?

SHYLOCK: Three thousand ducats for three months, and Antonio bound.

BASSANIO: Your answer to that.

SHYLOCK: Antonio is a good man. (I.iii. 1-11)⁸

Here, Shylock uses repetition and carefully-placed interjections to masterful effect. He entices Bassanio by echoing "for three months" and "Antonio shall become bound," but forces anxious pauses upon the dialogue with each irritating "well." His refusal to answer Bassanio with a simple yes or no is not simply a sign of verbal teasing or "dangling," as Lawrence Danson has suggested.⁹ Rather, by withholding an answer, Shylock subtly resists conducting economic as well as linguistic transactions with Bassanio. In this way, Shylock establishes a connection between conversational and monetary exchange. Through pauses, repetition, and a final pun on the moral and economic connotations of "good," Shylock defies Bassanio's repeated attempts to impose limits on his response to the bond. Rather than reply in terms that readily satisfy Bassanio, Shylock disturbs and challenges him by remaining linguistically and economically unengageable.

If Shylock is subtly obdurate with Bassanio, he is ardently defiant toward Antonio's wishes. When Antonio enters the scene, he has little desire to speak directly to Shylock, from whom he only wants money; Antonio asks Bassanio, "Is he yet possessed/How much ye would?" (I.iii. 61-2). The odd wording of this question reveals contempt for Shylock in two ways. First, it suggests a low pun on the Jew's supposed "possession" by the devil. This gibe is consistent with Antonio's caustic remark about Shylock later in the scene, that the "devil can cite Scripture for his purpose" (95). Second, in his question, Antonio marginalizes Shylock by speaking about him in the third person despite his presence onstage. Shylock, however, refuses to be slighted or ignored, and he

176 : *Judaism*

interrupts with, "Ay, ay, three thousand ducats" (62). This interjection enables him to disrupt Antonio's conversation with Bassanio and protest his relegation to a third-person presence.

In the Jacob and Laban story which follows this exchange, Shylock further challenges both his relegation to marginal status and the evil connotation implied in Antonio's use of "possession." Lars Engle, one of the few critics to grapple with the exegesis, provides an insightful analysis based on the premise that "the Jacob story. . . is full of danger for Shylock."¹⁰ Indeed, notions of threat and discontinuity pervade Shylock's speech from the moment he starts to deliver it:

SHYLOCK: When Jacob grazed his uncle Laban's sheep—
This Jacob from our holy Abram was,
As his wise mother wrought in his behalf,
The third possessor; ay, he was the third—
ANTONIO: And what of him? Did he take interest? (68-72)

The reference to the patriarchs is a calculated *non sequitur*, and to make its impact even more disturbing to Antonio, Shylock breaks off his narrative to supply apparently irrelevant background information. Thus, his words here seem carefully crafted to serve a double purpose: to defend the practice of usury while offending Antonio. The significance of Shylock's digression is revealed through his skillful mockery of Antonio's initial pun on possession. While the merchant had implied only ten lines earlier that the Jew was "possessed" with deviant spirits, Shylock subtly twists this double meaning to remove the negative connotation from "possession" and align himself with the patriarchs. Thus he ingeniously suggests that each patriarch was not "possessed" by evil because of his Judaism, but, quite the opposite, a "possessor" of God's promise.¹¹

Such wordplay and digression annoy Antonio and prompt the merchant to ask impatiently, "And what of him? Did he take interest?" Shylock responds with a detailed description of Jacob's cunning actions, a speech which taunts both Antonio's argument for the abnormality of usury as well as the merchant's lack of children:

SHYLOCK: . . . the ewes being rank,
In the end of autumn turned to the rams;
And when the work of generation was
Between these woolly breeders in the act,
The skillful shepherd pilled me certain wands,
And in the doing of the deed of kind
He stuck them up before the fulsome ewes,
Who then conceiving, did in eaning time
Fall parti-colored lambs, and those were Jacob's. (77-85)

This speech is part of Shylock's attempt to draw a parallel between Jacob's manipulative tactic and his own usury in order to suggest that usury is as natu-

ral as sexual propagation. Using alternately rolling and terse alliteration, Shylock makes the sheep's sexual activities uncomfortably visual: "rank" ewes "turned to the rams" "in the end of autumn" for "the work of generation" and "the doing of the deed of kind." He supplements this with the bizarre image of "woolly breeders," a coarse description of mating sheep. According to Shylock, Jacob himself takes an active role as the one who "stuck ["certain wands"] up before the fulsome ewes" in order to carry out his plan. Thus, through the use of a phallic object, Jacob makes the ewes conceive a specific type of lamb.

Shylock uses this tale of overt sexuality to disturb Antonio's containing presence. With references to the reproductive behavior of sheep, Shylock's exegesis of the Jacob story seems "full of danger," not so much for the Jew, as Lars Engle suggests, as for Antonio, who is confronted in this speech with a subtle criticism of both his opinion of usury and his own lack of offspring. Shylock, by craftily arguing that usury gives him the power to control acts of reproduction, directly challenges Antonio's belief that usury involves the use of "barren metal" (131). When Antonio expresses impatience once more with "Was this inserted to make interest good?/Or is your gold and silver ewes and rams?," Shylock retorts with a pun which aligns usury and reproduction: "I cannot tell; I make it breed a fast" (91-3). Shylock defends usury as natural and regenerative rather than abnormal and impotent. Furthermore, Shylock argues that interest, like sexual reproduction, is a creative, productive catalyst; he suggests that interest is necessary to produce new wealth, just as sex is essential to create new people. In this way, his words belie the definition of usury to which Antonio subscribes.

By emphasizing sexual regeneration in the Jacob story, Shylock further discomforts Antonio, the play's only bachelor and childless adult.¹² Although E. Pearlman considers Shylock "hungry for money but basically unsexual or anti-sexual," it seems that Shylock equates sexual regeneration with the interest he gains through usury.¹³ In fact, Shylock blurs distinctions between the two, so that he would have his "gold and silver" "breed as fast" as "ewes and rams." Using this analogy to argue that usury is as natural as sexual reproduction, Shylock can only further disturb Antonio, who lacks offspring as well as the hope of marrying and producing them. Hence, Shylock's exegesis, as an argument for the legitimacy of usury and a statement of sexual fecundity, challenges and discomforts the very man who most detests him.

Antonio and Bassanio are not alone in failing to contain Shylock's presence. In the second act, after Jessica has absconded with a portion of her father's savings, Solanio presents a narrative of Shylock's reaction to Jessica's flight which attempts to satirize the Jew:

SOLANIO: I never heard a passion so confused,
So strange, outrageous, and so variable,
As the dog Jew did utter in the streets:
"My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!

178 : *Judaism*

Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!
Justice! The law! My ducats and my daughter!
A sealed bag, two sealed bags of ducats,
Of double ducats, stol'n from me by my daughter!
And jewels—two stones, two rich and precious stones,
Stol'n by my daughter! Justice! Find the girl!
She hath the stones upon her, and the ducats!" (II.viii.12-22)

We should be wary to take this passage at face value, for, as Paul Cantor correctly observes, Solanio's paraphrase of Shylock is not simply a quotation of Shylock's words verbatim, but a caricature.¹⁴ As a caricature in the guise of a paraphrase, the speech becomes a complex form of containment. Solanio purports to repeat Shylock's words, but he actually exaggerates and manipulates them to construct a warped picture of how, as we later discover, Shylock reacted.¹⁵ Although he delivers this report in order to make Shylock's personality seem, like a "dog Jew," inhuman and obsessive, Solanio ironically implicates not so much Shylock here as his own bad judgment. We might find it difficult to discover what in the speech seems "so strange . . . and so variable," for Solanio's rendition is nothing if not predictable in its reliance on the Jewish stereotype and in its redundant use of "daughter," "ducats," "justice," "stol'n," and so forth.

As we later see firsthand, Shylock's response to Jessica's departure uses much of the same language as Solanio's paraphrase, but exhibits anger and pain that the crude parody simply does not convey. When Tubal tells Shylock of Jessica's whereabouts, there is an almost chilling bitterness in the abandoned father's words: "I would my daughter were dead at my feet, and the jewels in her ear! Would she were hearsed at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin!" (III.i.83-5). With its funerary pall, this passage is anything but comic. Furthermore, there is mournful remorse in Shylock's tone as he realizes he will have "no satisfaction, no revenge, nor no ill luck stirring but what lights o' my shoulders, no sighs but o' my breathing, no tears but o' my shedding" (III.i.89-91). These lines convey a genuine sense of loss and tragedy, not the humorous obsessiveness of Solanio's shallow parody, which deprived Shylock's reaction of its emotional core and left only the empty shell of similar words ("daughter," "ducats," and "jewels"). It seems that Shakespeare allows Solanio to deliver his satiric paraphrase first, so that when Shylock finally speaks, his own deeper feelings undermine the limited portrayal that Solanio had previously constructed for him.

As we have seen thus far in *Merchant*, Shylock's physical presence is at once required by the Venetians—enabling Bassanio to finance travel to Belmont—and despised by them, as revealed by Solanio's demeaning paraphrase. However, rather than placidly acquiesce to the paradoxical constraints set on his shoulders, Shylock adamantly defies them. The play's famous "I am a Jew" speech represents the culmination of Shylock's rebellious attitude:

SHYLOCK: Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?—fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons,

SHYLOCK & CLOSURE : 179

subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge! If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why revenge! The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction. (II.i 55-69)

The cohesiveness of this speech pivots upon a series of intricate counterbalances. Nourishing feeding is juxtaposed against poisoning, the latter of which, with the wounds, the diseases, and pricking, is counteracted by healing. In the middle of the passage, warming and cooling conveniently neutralize each other. Shylock neatly places his tickling question next to his pricking one, thereby suggesting a metaphorical relationship between creeping fingers' and a puncturing point's contact with skin (in addition to the rhyming of the two verbs). This complex series of counterbalances gives the speech a symmetry which allows it to stand on its own, similar to a soliloquy.¹⁶ Ironically, Shylock chooses an unpredictable moment—when he is in the company of two of the play's least significant characters—to deliver one of the play's most extraordinary pieces of rhetoric.

Embracing a plethora of corporal perceptions, from an animated tickle to cold-blooded murder, Shylock's lines emphasize a sensuality which transcends the social hierarchy imposed by the Christian community. While Shylock's previous earthiness relied on brash statements of sexual activity in order to rile Antonio, now the focus is on basic mortal characteristics and sensations: at first, eyes, hands, and organs; then, illness and health, life and death, and laughter. His images work to challenge and eradicate notions of difference which the Christians want desperately to maintain. For, Shylock speaks not only of Jewish experience, but of human experience. In doing so, he confronts Salerio and Solanio with what, for them, must seem a frightening prospect: that, despite his religious and cultural identity, he shares with them a fundamental humanity.

With his final query—"if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?"—Shylock consciously vocalizes his challenge to containment for the first time. No longer will he taunt and be taunted. His vow for vengeance is as eloquent a statement of defiance as it is a call for Antonio's pound of flesh. Kiernan Ryan artfully writes that this speech introduces "the full, protesting force of an irresistible egalitarian vision, whose basis in the shared faculties and needs of our common physical nature implicitly indicts all forms of inhuman discrimination."¹⁷ Shylock's forcefulness leaves Salerio and Solanio stunned and speechless; the climactic affirmation of vengeance is only disturbed by the entrance of "a Man from Antonio" (s.d.). In the moment right before this, Solanio, Salerio, and perhaps the audience realize the shocking implications of Shylock's words. However irrational his response seems, it nevertheless represents a combative stance

180 : *Judaism*

against the restraining power of the Christian community, particularly the stifling voice of Antonio and the deceptive actions of Lorenzo.

Following this decisive argument for equality, Shylock's more intimate conversation with Tubal aids in further humanizing him by providing details of his present condition as a forsaken father and of his previous role as a husband. We watch Shylock reveal anger and despair, with his emotional state at the mercy of Tubal's words.¹⁸ In just forty lines, Shylock confesses his anguish over Jessica, his hatred towards Antonio, his attachment to his savings, and, perhaps most interestingly, his devotion to Leah, his wife:

TUBAL: One of them showed me a ring that he had of your daughter for a monkey.
SHYLOCK: Out upon her! Thou torturest me, Tubal. It was my turquoise; I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor. I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys. (III.i.111-16)

While this exchange contains an element of absurdity by juxtaposing a cherished ring against "a wilderness of monkeys," within the trade-off there is also, undeniably, a sense of poignancy. Clearly, Shylock values the "turquoise" that Leah gave him before their marriage, for the loss of the ring represents Jessica's paramount crime, the news of which actually goes so far as to "torture" him. Judging by the worth that Shylock places upon the ring, it quite possibly represents the only memento of Leah left to him. This passage, then, takes Shylock's "Hath not a Jew eyes?" argument one step further by establishing his humanity on an emotional level. He perceives his possessions as much more than simply a means to acquire more money and ensure prosperity in days to come. The turquoise ring represents for him not a method to build for his economic future, but a connection to his emotional past.

In the talk with Tubal, Shylock's character undergoes myriad developments which convey a multifaceted portrait. His urgent concerns of the present bring to the surface memorable past experiences. These, in turn, enable Shylock to appear as more of an individual human being and less a stereotypical menacing villain to us. As Norman Rabkin rightly argues, during this scene, we "respond to signals of Shylock's injured fatherhood, of his role as heavy father, of his light hearted mistreatment at the hands of the negligible Salerio and Solanio, of his motiveless malignity, and we try hopelessly to reduce to a single attitude our response."¹⁹ At once, then, Shylock strikes us as more fully humanized than his oppressors, and his characterization seems more complex than theirs. Shylock thus maintains a significant humanity which successfully undermines the other figures' attempts to belittle him.

In Shylock's first scene with Bassanio and Antonio, his resentment seems somewhat restrained and playful. But with Antonio behind bars, his tone suddenly shifts to an intractable extreme, beyond reason, humaneness, and even the ability to listen:

SHYLOCK & CLOSURE : 181

ANTONIO: I pray thee hear me speak.
SHYLOCK: I'll have my bond. I will not hear thee speak.
I'll have my bond, and therefore speak no more.
I'll not be made a soft and dull-eyed fool,
To shake the head, relent, and sigh, and yield
To Christian intercessors. Follow not.
I'll have no speaking; I will have my bond. (III.iii.11-17)

Earlier, Antonio attempted to silence Shylock while attaining a monetary bond. Here, though, the power dynamics have been reversed, so that Shylock now plays the role of stifler and bond seeker to the imprisoned merchant. Furthermore, Shylock reverses the roles with a diabolical twist; while Antonio's original desire for a loan of money was innocuous, Shylock's bond is deadly.

With "I will not hear thee speak," Shylock openly admits to what he had only hinted at with his repetitive "well" to Bassanio in their first scene together. That is, he now refuses outright to participate in conversational exchange, nor will he listen to Antonio. Shylock's "I'll have my bond, and therefore speak no more" expresses precisely Antonio and Bassanio's original demand upon him: a binding economic agreement but not a conversation, the latter of which implies a linguistic communion formed between speakers and listeners. Shylock seems to hint at the paradox of his own position as a member of an economic but not a social community in Venice. Through demands for both silence and fulfillment of a bond, Shylock forces Antonio into the very position in which the merchant had previously placed him.

Thus, the play constructs Shylock as a man acutely aware of his subservient role in Venice and preoccupied with how to thwart those who have relegated him to that position. As we have seen, he accomplishes this through coarse references to the corporeal, through stylish rhetoric, or by bluntly refusing to listen. Uniting all of these responses, the climactic trial scene sets Shylock against *Merchant*'s community as it frantically tries to impose closure upon him by swaying him from his violent plan. Conflict in the scene does not occur solely between Christian mercy and Jewish hardheartedness, as has often been argued.²⁰ Rather, what gets played out during the trial is, in part, the battle between expectation, in the guise of comic closure, and defiance of what is expected, as represented by Shylock's determination to perform the directive of his bond.

Early on, the scene establishes the expectation that the Christian community will triumph over the outsider. The Duke hints at this when he tells Shylock, "We all expect a gentle answer, Jew" (IV.i.34). Indeed, the Duke does not simply want "a gentle answer," he *expects* it, as if he knows he is a player in a comedy, and that comedy requires overcoming obstacles to secure comic integration and closure. And if the title character succumbs to Shylock's knife, hope for such closure is, of course, doomed. The court scene, then, captures characters in *Merchant* as they struggle to save their own comedy from imminent collapse.

182 : *Judaism*

Portia, dressed as the judge Balthazar, functions both to interpret the law and to ensure that the comedy achieves closure. After Antonio confesses to Shylock's bond, Portia commands: "Then must the Jew be merciful" (181). Disguised as a representative of the law, Portia gains the authority to make such absolute decrees in Venice. Yet, her command serves a structural purpose as well. Portia does not say solely that Shylock should show mercy, but that he *must*. As with the Duke's desire for a "gentle answer," Portia's words suggest an underlying expectation for behavior which will guarantee proper comic closure. Indeed, by saving Antonio's life while defeating Shylock, Portia effectively removes the obstacle to the comic denouement. Shakespeare accomplishes a fascinating unity of plot and structure through her, since she serves a dual purpose as both judge *within* the intrigue of *Merchant*, decreeing what is correct behavior in Venice, and judge *without*, determining how best to overcome the obstacle to community and close the comic framework of the play.

Like Portia, the Duke attempts to overpower and ultimately expel Shylock. Rather than put Shylock to death, however, he forces the Jew to give up all of his savings:

DUKE: Thou shalt see the difference of our spirit,
I pardon thee thy life before thy ask it.
For half thy wealth, it is Antonio's;
The other half comes to the general state,
Which humbleness may drive into a fine. (367-71)

Jean Howard has written that a "pardon so self-righteously granted seems more a gesture of pride than of spontaneous mercy," and she is right to see in the Duke's pronouncement a thinly veiled ego trip.²¹ Also present, however, is the urge to deprive Shylock of his only source of power—his money. But, as Shylock says, such an action would do more than simply bankrupt him:

SHYLOCK: Nay, take my life and all! Pardon not that!
You take my house, when you do take the prop
That doth sustain my house. You take my life
When you do take the means whereby I live. (373-6)

Shylock makes a valid point here, since usury, as we have seen, was one of the only means by which Jews could earn a living.²² In these lines, Shylock continues to drive home his paradoxical relationship with Venice's Christians, by imploring them to understand that their "pardon" promises not forgiveness but annihilation. Ironically, the Duke spares Shylock's life by "tak[ing]" the very things which enable Shylock to live. Thus, the "pardon" which seemed motivated by mercy reveals itself to be mercilessly sadistic. Had the Duke ordered Shylock's death, at least this would have been a terminal punishment, but the Duke's so-called pardon instead promises to be interminably torturous and humiliating. Stripped of his possessions—the very things which define his identity

in Venetian society—Shylock retains his life, but no possible way to live it.

Together with the Duke's pardon, Antonio's final demand for Shylock's conversion constitutes a self-defeating and excessive punishment. Rather than let Shylock remain a Jew, albeit a poor one, Antonio suggests a different penalty:

ANTONIO: So please the Duke and all the court
To quit the fine for half his goods,
I am content; so he will let me have
The other half in use, to render it
Upon his death to the gentleman
That lately stole his daughter.
Two things provided more: that for this favor
He presently become a Christian;
The other, that he do record a gift
Here in the court of all he dies possessed
Unto his son Lorenzo and his daughter. (379-89)

Not only does Antonio's supposed "favor" maintain, in the long run, total control over Shylock's possessions, but it further stipulates that Shylock "become a Christian." Hence, Antonio's punishment does not fully restore Shylock's independent economic status, and it completely obliterates Shylock's cultural and religious connections. The punishment comes to represent not so much a response to a misdeed as it does a personal attack on an outsider. By maintaining economic and religious control over Shylock, Antonio attempts to eradicate the Jew's identity on every level. Paul Cantor notes that, as we watch Antonio pronounce his punishment, we "sense that Venice is forcibly imposing conformity, responding to a challenge to its beliefs by simply trying to eliminate that challenge."²³ Ironically, rather than teach Shylock a lesson in compassion and display evidence of the mercy which just moments ago Portia had urged Shylock to use, Antonio goes too far.

The conversion's harshness reveals a fundamental anxiety among the Christians to reach closure. The conversion is so excessive that it does not elevate Shylock to the level of a gratified, merciful Christian, but reduces him to a broken, weary man. When Portia asks him, "art thou contented, Jew?," he merely echoes her resignedly with, "I am content" (392-3). There is no evidence of the conversion bringing Shylock any solace, newfound understanding, or acceptance into the Christian community. Rather, it humiliates him, and he exits anticlimactically:

SHYLOCK: I pray you, give me leave to go from hence.
I am not well. Send the deed after me,
And I will sign it. (394-6)

The incomplete act of signing the deed seems to symbolize Shylock's relationship with the Christian community as he leaves the stage. The conversion,

far from enlightening Shylock in the glories of Christianity, sickens him into silence. In their anxious rush to reach closure, the Venetians and Belmontians have attempted to overcome an obstacle to community at a terrible price. Denying Shylock his dignity, the Christians have mercilessly victimized him.

3. "And yet I am sure you are not satisfied/Of these events at full": Shylock's Containment Defied and Closure Denied

The cruel punishment of Shylock casts an ominous cloud over the final act's attempts at blissful closure. When E. C. Pettet writes that "the play dissolves, appropriately, in the exquisite love scene under the moon in Belmont," he disregards the very inappropriateness of the Christians' behavior toward Shylock and the way in which this flaws the play's comic ending.²⁴ As the Christians celebrate their own marriages and good tidings, their joy is undercut by an audience's acute awareness of Shylock's absence. The words of Portia and Jessica reveal that the Christians' improper treatment of Shylock overpowers the festive attempts of the final act.

Rather than revel in the triumph of community, the characters in Belmont struggle gloomily to honor their newly-formed bonds. Their conversations are overshadowed, literally and figuratively, by Shylock's mistreatment. Portia makes this clear when she compares Belmont's nighttime to a day plagued by dark clouds:

PORTIA: This night methinks is but the daylight sick;
It looks a little paler. 'Tis a day
Such as the day when the sun is hid. (V.i. 124-6)

Portia's image of a sick, paling night undermines the attempts to create a lively scene in Belmont. While glorious sunshine would have portrayed the confident couples in brilliant light, the inclement weather seems to reflect discomfort below the play's surface. According to Portia, the clouds hide the sun from view, and this has the effect of infecting the day with disease. But Portia's metaphor also seems to give voice to a deeper message within the play. Just as the clouds cover the sun, the characters of *Merchant* have hidden Shylock away by refusing to acknowledge his cruel punishment and by attempting to forget him. As the sickness which Portia refers to darkens an otherwise sunny day, *Merchant*'s Christians have inflicted their comedy with an illness, the inability to deal satisfyingly with Shylock, which darkens what should be a radiant closure to the play.

Throughout the final act, pessimism, discomfort, and doubt emanate from Jessica. Her few lines and mysterious silences reveal a subtle alignment with her father's personality. During the act's opening exchange between herself and Lorenzo, she puts a damper on the romantic mood with a suggestion of dishonest love:

JESSICA: In such a night
Did young Lorenzo swear he loved her well,
Stealing her soul with many vows of faith,
And ne'er a true one. (Vi. 17-20)

Just as her father mocked Antonio's sexuality earlier, so Jessica now mocks Lorenzo's status as a faithful husband.²⁵ However, while Shylock disturbed the single Antonio by discussing the natural reproductive activity of "woolly breeders," Jessica teases the married Lorenzo with the dour insinuation that his "vows of faith" to her are suspect and that he is a liar, perhaps even an adulterer. Jessica, then, ridicules the sexual attitudes of the Christian community as her father had before her, and, by doing so, her personality is partially aligned with Shylock's. Thus, the Jew's presence, although banished, resurfaces through his daughter's attitudes and effectively challenges the supposed fidelity of the very thing which enables communal continuity—marriage—in the final act.

Furthermore, like Shylock, Jessica stubbornly refuses to conform to the wishes of the Christian community. As Lorenzo tries in vain to entertain her by speaking of celestial music as the "harmony . . . in immortal souls" and finally ordering music to be played, Jessica's discomfort becomes most acute:

LORENZO: Come ho, and wake Diana with a hymn!
With sweetest touches pierce your mistress' ear
And draw her home with music.

Play music

JESSICA: I am never merry when I hear sweet music.
LORENZO: The reason is, your spirits are attentive. (Vi. 70)

By calling for music, Lorenzo desires to envelop himself and Jessica in an illusion of blissful harmony, where only his notion of celestial notes played by "young-eyed cherubins" can be heard (62). Yet, with her remark, Jessica refuses to participate in this illusion. Her words betray deep feelings of anxiety and detract from the joyous atmosphere that Lorenzo struggles to attain. Jessica cannot easily make her "spirits" less "attentive" and simply disregard her sadness for the sake of a comic resolution. Rather than pretend, as Lorenzo does, that music has the power to resolve problematic situations, she acknowledges her discomfort and draws an audience's attention to the artificial nature of Lorenzo's request in light of what has happened to Shylock.

Both Jessica and Shylock represent what Ralph Berry describes as "the unmentionable" in the play, that is, threatening forces which the central community tries vainly to sweep aside and cover up.²⁶ In court, the Duke told Shylock that he "*expect[ed]* a gentle answer," and Portia announced that Shylock "must . . . be merciful," as if they knew that obstacles to comedy have to be defeated if comic closure is to be attained. Lorenzo seems to share this attitude when he elaborates on the beneficial effects of harmonious sounds and then concludes with an imperative for Jessica to "mark the music" (88). In effect, Lorenzo forces

Jessica to endure the music, despite the fact that she seems unwilling to partake in his musical illusion of happiness.

Jessica's pessimistic remark about "sweet music" is also her last speaking moment in the play. Rather than permit the existence of challenges to comic progression, Lorenzo stifles Jessica's voice, just as Portia and the Duke do to Shylock's in the courtroom. Thus, the Christian community effectively marginalizes both the Jewish father and his converted daughter. Whereas Shylock leaves the stage, however, Jessica remains onstage in spite of her silent misgivings, watching but not conversing with the other characters. The audience never hears her respond to Lorenzo's silencing mechanism, and the text does not indicate how she reacts. This leads an audience to wonder whether or not Jessica remains internally torn between Jewish and Christian worlds and between her father's and her husband's households.²⁷ By stifling Jessica's voice, the Christians fail to resolve, and prevent Jessica from resolving, her religious, cultural, and social allegiances. Anxiously attempting to reach closure, the characters of *Merchant* have only compounded their difficulties by failing to deal satisfactorily not just with Shylock, but with Jessica as well.

Many of Shakespeare's festive comedies, including *Love's Labors Lost*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*, end with song and dance celebrating the integration of community. But *The Merchant of Venice* ends quietly and anticlimactically, with Gratiano's crass quibble on "Nerissa's ring" and the Christians' hasty exit. In marked contrast to endings of other Shakespearean comedies, I envision a performance in which the stage remains absolutely silent and still, similar to Jack Gold's 1980 BBC production. Jessica has been left alone on the set; her solitude expresses her own hesitancy to participate in the revelry, just as it also parallels Shylock's own solitude off-stage. She reads his "special deed of gift," the document that Nerissa has given to her and to Lorenzo, which states that they will inherit Shylock's property upon his death (291-2). This deed represents the only connection remaining between the Jewish father and his converted daughter, and I believe that it jars Jessica's memory to recall stealing Shylock's jewels and learning of his subsequent punishment. In this sudden moment of realization for her as well as for the audience, her expression slowly shifts from happy anticipation of married life as a Christian, to guilty regret for what she has tacitly allowed to be done to her father. Jessica's performance thus involves the skillful act of opening the play up to the audience and encouraging us along with her, to feel sorrow for Shylock's treatment.

4. Conclusion

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock fulfills a necessary role in the Christians' economic community as a usurer, but he is simultaneously shunned because of his Judaism, while, within the play, he represents a threatening presence

SHYLOCK & CLOSURE : 187

which a welcoming community must paradoxically ostracize in order to reach comic closure. Similarly, Jessica, as a wife with a large dowry, is required for the Christians' economic community, but, like her father, she, too, is alienated for voicing a challenge to closure. Hence, both Shylock and Jessica are necessary to the play's central community for their economic importance and their role as obstacles which must be overcome. Yet, in the community's efforts to reach closure, it fails to deal appropriately with these opposing voices. Rather than negotiate with its outsiders, the Christian community silences them, but with so much force that its attempts are undermined. In the process of restraining Shylock, the society ironically draws attention to the unrestrained cruelty that it uses in its own punishment of difference.

By allowing Shylock and Jessica to undermine closure, Shakespeare unites the historical and literary concerns outlined above. He seems to recognize the inherent similarity between Renaissance Venice's need for the Jew in order to define itself economically, and the need of his play's Venetians to ostracize Shylock in order to define themselves as a community. Indeed, Shakespeare creates a fascinating tension between the exclusionary practices of Venetian Christians and the demands of the comic genre.

Leaving this tension unresolved, Shakespeare makes a statement about the tendency of both comic form and historical circumstance to require an "other" for self-definition. He problematizes the fact that comic characters, like sixteenth-century Venetians, manipulate and finally ostracize those outside of their central community. By allowing Shylock to upset the play's closure, then, Shakespeare places in the foreground the position of the "other."²⁸ He suggests that, rather than operating under principles of egalitarianism and mercy, the Christians of the comedy and of Venice take what they want from Jews, only to hide them away in an attempt to silence their frustrated voices. Defying containment and overshadowing *The Merchant of Venice*'s closure, Shylock protests the fact that the comedy has established community at the paradoxical price of ghettoizing its outsider.

NOTES

1. C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), pp. 4, 6-8. Barber defines the "butts" as scapegoats who obstruct the actions of the play's central community in Shakespeare's comedies. Thus, characters such as Falstaff are not "butt" figures, according to Barber's use of the term.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

3. Bernard Glassman, "The New Jewish Villain," *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes without Jews* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975), p. 62. This chapter provides background information on the development of Jewish stereotypes during the Renaissance.

4. Cecil Roth, *The Jews in the Renaissance* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1959), p. 6.

5. For a dramatic treatment of the ways in which city governments required and extracted Jewish funds for self-protection, see Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, one of Shakespeare's

188 : *Judaism*

most important sources for *The Merchant*. For more on English Christian perceptions of, and relations with, Jews, see the introduction in James Bulman, *The Merchant of Venice* [Shakespeare in Performance Series] (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991).

6. Glassman, p. 68.

7. Roth, p. 13. John Gross's recent book *Shylock: A Legend and Its Legacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), contains information and insights on the ghetto of Venice, pp. 23-28, as well as a marvelously detailed summary of the play's sources, Shylock's performance history, and critical and popular responses to him.

8. All references to *The Merchant of Venice* are taken from *The Merchant of Venice*, edited by Kenneth Myrick (New York: Signet Classic, 1987).

9. Lawrence Danson, *The Harmonies of The Merchant of Venice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 139.

10. Lars Engle, "'Thrift is Blessing': Exchange and Explanation in *The Merchant of Venice*," *Shakespeare Studies* 37 (1986), p. 29. See also, Gross, pp. 30-33.

11. I find Engle's word choice particularly suggestive when he writes that "Shylock claims to possess the patriarchs . . . and to interpret their example with authority" (p. 29). Here, Engle uses a meaning of "possess" which, knowingly or unknowingly, plays on Antonio's possession pun by twisting it just as Shylock does. Instead of the Devil possessing Shylock, we now have Shylock possessing Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

12. Coppelia Kahn has argued convincingly for Antonio's homosexuality in "The Cuckoo's Note: Male Friendship and Cuckoldry in *The Merchant of Venice*," *Shakespeare's "Rough Magic": Renaissance Essays in Honor of C. L. Barber*, ed. by Peter Erikson and Coppelia Kahn (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985), pp. 104-110.

13. E. Pearlman, "Shakespeare, Freud, and the Two Usuries, or, Money's a Meddler," *English Literary Renaissance* 2 (1972): 222.

14. Paul A. Cantor, "Religion and the Limits of Community in *The Merchant of Venice*," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 70 (1987): 249.

15. Shakespeare uses these notions of caricature and paraphrase similarly in *Othello*, when Iago relays what seem to be Cassio's sleepy outbursts to Othello:

IAGO: In sleep I heard him say, "Sweet Desdemona,
Let us be wary, let us hide our loves!"
And then, sir, he would gripe and wring my hand,
Cry "O sweet creature!" Then kiss me hard,
As if he plucked up kisses by the roots
That grew upon my lips; laid his leg o'er my thigh,
And sigh, and kiss, and then cry, "Cursed fate
That gave thee to the Moor!" (III.iii.416-23)

Just as Solanio slandered Shylock with the message equating daughters and ducats, so Iago condemns, and, even more extremely than Solanio, nearly dooms, Cassio by portraying him as a lusty, jealous suitor. Paraphrasing, then, represents for both Solanio and Iago a means to ridicule and manipulate their enemies.

16. This point gains even more credence if we accept James Bulman's suggestion that Shylock's speech may have originally been delivered directly to the audience as a soliloquy; see Bulman, p. 8.

17. Kieman Ryan, *Harvester New Readings: Shakespeare* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1989), p. 17.

18. Ralph Berry, "Discomfort in *The Merchant of Venice*," *Shakespeare and the Awareness of the Audience* (London: Macmillan Press, 1985), p. 57.

19. Norman Rabkin, "Meaning and *The Merchant of Venice*," *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 6.

20. See, for example, Barber, p. 185; Danson, p. 164; E. C. Pettet, "The Merchant of Venice and the Problem of Usury," *English Association Essays and Studies* 31 (1945), p. 29.

21. Jean Howard, "The Difficulties of Closure: An Approach to The Problematic in Shakespearean Comedy," in *Comedy from Shakespeare to Sheridan*, ed. by A. R. Braunmuller and J. C. Bulman (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1986), p. 124.

22. Bulman, p. 21.

23. Cantor, p. 253.

24. Pettet, p. 29.

25. Importantly, the act begins with Jessica and Lorenzo exchanging a series of remarks about various tragically doomed couples (Ryan, p. 22). The tragic subjects of the opening conversation ironically undermine the comic harmony that Lorenzo hopes to foster.

26. Berry, p. 57.

27. Lawrence Danson claims with hesitation that, in "I am never merry when I hear sweet music," Jessica expresses herself "with (I take it) a newcomer's insecurity" (Danson, p. 187). Rather than insecurity, it seems that Jessica reveals the reluctance that she, as well as the audience, feel toward rejoicing in comic closure so soon after her father has been humiliatingly banished. I do not agree with John Gross's opinion that Jessica's "emotional bond with [Shylock] is broken" in this act, and that her silence suggests her acquiescence to the others (Gross, p. 62). Ralph Berry is perhaps correct when he writes that "Jessica becomes a focus of stillness and darkness" in the final act and that she "has a long way to go in Christian society" (Berry, pp. 61, 59).

28. I would not go so far as to claim that the ambiguous ending does enough to balance the oppression of Shylock. Rather, it avoids providing a simplistic comic resolution and thus calls into question the appropriateness of his treatment.

Everyman's Intellectual: Remembering Irving Howe

KENNETH LIBO

WHILE MOST PEOPLE KNEW IRVING HOWE AS A critic, academic, and writer, I was privileged to know him as a collaborator and friend. Meeting with Irving on a regular basis over a period of several years, I grew to know and appreciate his personal side. I remember Irving at his most poignant when he was living in a furnished room at the Hotel des Artistes on West 66th Street in Manhattan. He was between marriages and, from the look on his face when he opened the door, having a hard time readjusting to bachelorhood. What I saw when I walked in looked more like a Hadassah rummage sale after a busy day than the residence of a distinguished man of letters. With articles of clothing strewn here and boxes of books stacked there, I didn't know where to sit.

No sooner had I cleared a place for myself on the couch when the bell rang. In came a delivery man holding a box from a trendy Madison Avenue tailor shop. What came out of the box surprised me even more—a Nehru jacket. Irving was a radical thinker, but a radical dresser? Irving, of course, was no stranger to paradox. Called everything from an uptown socialist to a male chauvinist (for omitting “mothers” from the title of *World of Our Fathers*), is it any wonder that Irving had to be a skilled polemicist merely to survive the scrutiny of an ever-watchful public?

My first encounter with Irving Howe was as a graduate student at the City University of New York in the middle '60s. Listening to his impassioned *droshes* on Dostoyevsky, Mann, Kafka, Joyce, Eliot, Proust, and other literary modernists was a high point of my graduate-school education. Erudite without ever being pompous or impercipient, Irving made us feel at home with some of the most imaginative minds of the twentieth century. This took place during a period of major political strife, and though Irving was deeply embroiled in affairs of the moment, they never got in the way of his or his students' appreciation of *Notes from Underground*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Metamorphosis*, or some other transcendent text.

At the end of a seminar on Henry James, Irving announced he was looking for an assistant on a new project. A struggling student in need of the extra income, I raised my hand and embarked on the journey that would culminate, some years later, in the publication of *World of Our Fathers*. The longer I worked with Irving, the more I grew to appreciate *his* extraordinary journey from

KENNETH LIBO is coauthor, with Irving Howe, of *World of Our Fathers and How We Lived*, and author of *We Lived There Too: Pioneer Jews and the Westward Movement of America*.

REMEMBERING IRVING HOWE : 191

tenement life in the East Bronx to literary and academic renown. What impressed me right from the start was his unflinching honesty in looking back at himself. Here is an example from "The Lost Young Intellectual," an essay that appeared in *Commentary* early in Irving's career:

At the age of five I really knew Yiddish better than English. I attended my first day of kindergarten as if it were a visit to a new country. The teacher asked the children to identify various common objects. When my turn came she held up a fork and without hesitation I called out its Yiddish name, a *goopel*. The whole class burst out laughing at me with that special cruelty children can have. That afternoon I told my parents I had made up my mind never to speak Yiddish to them again, though I would not give any reasons.

The dissonance Irving described must have been recognizable to most post-World War II readers of *Commentary*. Like Irving, they had recently broken out of Yiddish-speaking ghettos and looked back now at *mameloshn* with mixed feelings at best. As an editor and writer, Irving worked diligently to turn these feelings around. "My own hope," he recalled in his memoir, *Margin of Hope*, "was to achieve some equilibrium with that earlier self which had started with childhood Yiddish, my language of naming, and then turned away in adolescent shame." It would not be an exaggeration to say that Irving devoted much of his adult life to righting that wrong.

By the time I got to know him, Irving was something of a Jewish folk hero in graduate circles for taking Mendele Mokher Sforim, Sholom Aleichem, and Isaac Bashevis Singer and treating them with all of the passionate intensity he directed toward Stendahl, Turgenev, James, and Faulkner. For Jews of my generation getting off on Lenny Bruce and *Portnoy's Complaint*, Irving's approach to Jewish life was refreshingly undeprecating.

Because of his many non-Jewish associations, Irving grew to look upon himself as a "partial Jew." This, of course, was in direct contradiction to his overwhelmingly Jewish upbringing in the East Bronx. Lined with pushcarts and sweatshops, socialist clubs and tenement *shtieblekh*, the East Bronx of Irving's youth was the next step up from the Lower East Side for countless garment workers, nickel-and-dime entrepreneurs, and their families. It was about as Jewish a piece of land as you could find at the time in America. That Irving grew up in the middle of it all, just a few blocks from the house on Kelly Street where Sholom Aleichem died, made him, to my way of thinking, no more a partial Jew than Maurice Chevalier was a partial Frenchman.

The East Bronx of Irving Howe's youth was a hotbed of highbrow Jewish culture. Boris Aronson's first assignment in America was as a Constructivist set designer for an experimental Yiddish theatre in the East Bronx producing plays like Ossip Dymov's *Bronx Express* and Sholom Aleichem's *Stempenyu*. Nearby, Reuben Breinen the poet was keeping Hebrew alive, while very Sunday, rain or shine, Irving recalls in *A Margin of Hope*, "a cluster of Yiddish writers and poets . . . would gather near a big rock in Crotona Park where I would go to play

192 : *Judaism*

ball or wander around.” Some time later, Irving translated into English the following poem by Anna Margolin, entitled “Girls in Crotona Park”:

*As in a faded picture,
Girls have woven themselves
Into the autumn evening,
Their eyes cool, their smiles wild and thin,
Their clothes lavender, old-rose and apple-green.
Dew flows through their veins,
Their words are bright and clear.
Botticelli once loved them in a dream.*

When Anna Margolin was reading her verses in Crotona Park in the '30s, Irving more than likely had Botticelli more than Yiddish poetry on his mind, as well as Wordsworth and Milton, thanks to the New York Public Library system. Yet whether at home, in the neighborhood candy store, on the nearby streets, in the alcoves of City College, or at Trotskyist meetings in Union Square, Irving's milieu remained overwhelmingly Jewish. “If you found a job,” Irving recalls in *A Margin of Hope*, “it was likely to be in a ‘Jewish industry,’ and if you went to college it was still with Jewish students. We did not realize how sheltering it was to grow up in this environment” or, Irving might have added, how much outside influences took on Jewish characteristics.

Irving got his first taste of Jewish socialism as a child. On the street corners, in the Workmen's Circle *shules*, on the pages of the *Forverts*, in the minds and hearts of poor East Bronx Jews during the Depression, socialism prevailed. Jacob Panken, one of the most effective soapboxers around, attracted large Yiddish-speaking audiences with his clear ringing voice, sharp wit, and bursts of indignation. Using essentially the same argumentative devices that Jews used traditionally in *pilpul* (talmudic dialectics), Panken appealed to Irving and his YPSL (Young People's Socialist League) confederates not only by attacking Stalin's anti-Semitic policies but also, on a practical level, by directing their Jewish messianic aspirations toward tangible, realistic goals, like doing something about consumption, cleaning the streets, preventing industrial accidents, and keeping capitalist profiteers in check.

The fervor Irving felt for socialism not only as a youth but throughout his life is captured in the following remarks by Morris Hillquit, a Yiddish-speaking socialist who ran for mayor of New York eighty years ago and almost won:

I am a socialist because I cannot be anything else. I cannot accept the ugly world of capitalism, with its brutal struggles and needless sufferings, its archaic and irrational economic structure, its cruel social contrasts, its moral callousness and spiritual degradations. . . . If there were no organized socialist movement or socialist party, if I were alone, all alone in the whole country and the world, I could not help opposing capitalism and pleading for a better and saner order, pleading for socialism.

REMEMBERING IRVING HOWE : 193

Years later Irving defined as the great themes of Yiddish literature the virtue of powerlessness, the power of helplessness, the company of the dispossessed, and the sanctity of the insulted and injured. That these characteristics suited the lives of Jacob Panken and Morris Hillquit as much as they did the characters of Peretz and Sholom Aleichem is a distinguishing feature of the Jewish socialism Irving practiced and preached as an editor and writer.

As a teenager, Irving fell under the spell of Max Shachtman, the perfect prototype for a New York Jewish intellectual-in-the-making. Quick-minded, sardonic in tone, cosmopolitan in taste, Shachtman had a face, Irving later recalled, “you’d expect to find in a bazaar or a diamond center: swarthy, expressive, shrewd.” In polemical debates, Shachtman relied on a mixture of irony and passion that became part and parcel of Irving’s Jewish intellectual make-up during his formative YPSL-Trotskyist years.

Around the end of World War II, something extraordinary took place in America’s world of letters. Some of the best and brightest young men from Europe and America’s Yiddish-speaking ghettos coalesced into a group of writers whom Irving dubbed “the New York Intellectuals.” With exceptions like Dwight McDonald who wasn’t Jewish, and Lionel and Diana Trilling who didn’t grow up poor, the New York Intellectuals shared not only common plebeian origins but also a common goal. As contributors to *Partisan Review*, *Commentary*, and *Dissent*, they set out to break into America’s Waspified literary and cultural establishment and succeeded beyond their wildest dreams.

Though some may have dreamed of escaping the constrictive world of the ghetto to the point of putting their Jewishness behind them, in a preponderantly Gentile and largely unfamiliar world Irving and his intellectual friends could not help but grow increasingly conscious of being Jewish. What they would do with their consciousness, of course, varied with the individual. For Irving, this was a period of devouring the works of two of America’s great regional writers, Sherwood Anderson and William Faulkner. Far from functioning as escapes from Irving’s past, together they encouraged Irving to look upon Jewish New York as a metropolitan region of America every bit as palpable as Anderson’s Midwest or Faulkner’s South. From there Irving went in search of his East European Jewish roots.

When I discovered Irving Howe’s and Eliezer Greenberg’s *Treasury of Yiddish Stories* as a Dartmouth undergraduate, my knowledge of Yiddish culture did not go much beyond the everyday talk of immigrant parents, neighbors, and relatives. The idea of looking into my Yiddish literary heritage had, frankly, never occurred to me while going to *cheder*, grade school, high school, or the WASPy Ivy League college I attended in the ’50s. At Dartmouth we didn’t celebrate our Jewishness so much as minimize it. For spiritually beleaguered Jews of my generation, the Howe-Greenberg *Treasury* proved an invaluable ally in raising Jewish self-esteem and self-confidence.

194 : *Judaism*

The *Treasury of Yiddish Stories* also posed an enormous challenge in my work on *WOOF*, our acronym for *World of Our Fathers*. What I valued most about *Treasury* was its re-creation of the pre-Holocaust world of Mendelev Sforim, Isaac Leib Peretz, Sholom Aleichem, Sholom Asch, Joshua and Bashevis Singer, with their voices perpetuated in the English of Saul Bellow, Marie Syrkin, Maurice Samuel, Isaac Rosenfeld, Shlomo Katz, and others of equal stature, including Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg. The challenge was to find analogous voices and characters for *WOOF* out of the raw material of history.

One day, in the New York Public Library's Rare Book Room, I came across a manuscript report by Lillian Wald, dating back to her days as a visiting nurse in the Lower East Side. Reading it was a heartbreaking experience. Here are a few excerpts from a section of *WOOF* called "The Implacability of Gentleness":

Visit and care of typhoid patient, 182 Ludlow Street. Visit to 7 Hester Street where in room of Nathan S. found two children with measles. After much argument succeeded in bathing these two patients and the sick baby. The first time in their experience.

Gave tickets for Hebrew Sanitarium excursion to Mrs. Davis and three children, Mrs. Schneider and five children for Tuesday's excursion but five of the children are nearly naked, I am convinced, have no apparel in their possession. So we will make their decent appearance possible for the picnic.

In a rear tenement, top floor, on Allen Street, a doctor found a woman, a Mrs. Weichert, crazy and ill with pneumonia and typhoid; cared for by her 14 year old daughter. She had been crazy for some time and the husband and child had kept it a secret, fearing she would be forcibly taken to an asylum were it known. Though she died in a few days, I shall always be glad that one doctor told us in time so that she was made human and decent, bedding given and the child assisted to make her dwelling fit for habitation before her end.

Word cameos were subsequently put together of immigrant novelist Anzia Yezierska, political advisor Belle Moskowitz, labor organizer Rose Schneiderman, Yiddish actress Bertha Kalish, and other remarkable Jewish women.

At a time when "mom bashing" was all too fashionable in American Jewish circles, Irving Howe developed a love affair with the Jewish mother. This led to a lot of fireworks, like Irving discounting Philip Roth's importance as a Jewish American writer in the light of *Portnoy's Complaint* and Roth retaliating by turning Irving into a character in a subsequent novel. It also led to Irving writing the following tribute to the immigrant Jewish mother in a section of *WOOF* called "At the Heart of the Family":

Did she overfeed? Her mind was haunted by memories of a hungry childhood. Did she fuss about health? Infant mortality had been a plague in the old country and the horror of diphtheria overwhelming in this country. Did she dominate

REMEMBERING IRVING HOWE : 195

everyone within reach? A disarranged family structure endowed her with powers she had never known before, and burdens, too; it was to be expected that she should abuse the powers and find advantage in the burdens. The weight of centuries bore down.

Here is Irving Howe doing what he does best—uplifting us by taking a traditionally Jewish approach to life—generous, compassionate, humane.

What Irving Howe was to readers of our generation, Abraham Cahan, editor of the *Jewish Daily Forward* for half a century, was to our fathers and mothers, *bubbes* and *zeydes*—a guide for the perplexed. As much as Cahan guided his *Forverts* readers through the topsy-turvy world of the Lower East Side, so did Irving help their children and grandchildren find their bearings in a moral universe circumscribed by Kafka, Beckett, and the Holocaust. Making sense out of the Lower East Side was Cahan's task. Evoking the Lower East Side honestly and eloquently was Irving's.

Our concerted aim in *WOOF* and later in *How We Lived* was to provide an intimate yet objective sense of life on the Lower East Side at a time when the immigrant Jewish experience, significant as it was in the history of the country, and crucial for the lives of most American Jews, was in danger of becoming a sentimental myth. We were therefore interested all the more in the unvarnished truth, not in any self-serving fables about "two-cents plain."

I take pride in having worked with Irving Howe in portraying both the vitality and the weaknesses of the immigrant Jewish experience—the intensities of belief and aspiration toward idealistic goals, and also the high costs of suffering, frustration, and defeat. It is an experience that has enriched my life immeasurably, and for that I owe Irving an enormous debt of gratitude.

In an epilogue to *We Lived There Too*, Irving Howe wrote: "The hope for Jewish renewal in America depends upon steadily asking what Jewish existence means, what it has been, and what it should be. Only if the questions were to end would the heart stop beating." That the questions will not end for Irving Howe's many Jewish friends and admirers is reason enough to honor him.

STATEMENT

It has come to our attention that Robert Weisbrot should be credited for his fundamental contributions to an article, "Reluctant Partners: Juan Perón and the Jews of Argentina, 1946-1955," by Allan Metz (JUDAISM, Fall 1992), which draws crucially on the arguments, research, and language of Professor Weisbrot's book, *The Jews of Argentina: From the Inquisition to Perón* (Jewish Publication Society, 1979). Professor Metz regrets not expressly quoting and citing this work far more thoroughly throughout his article both for its ideas and writing.

THE PUBLISHER AND EDITORS OF JUDAISM

The Sins of the Census

ERNEST NEUFELD

WHY DID THE ISRAELITES HAVE TO MAKE atonement for the divinely ordained census? Why was counting the people considered a sin? Or did the sin attributed to the enumeration attach to something else?

The first census mentioned in the Bible is provided for while the Israelites are in the wilderness and Moses is receiving instructions from God regarding the construction of the Tabernacle and its furnishings:

The Lord spoke to Moses saying: When you take a census of the Israelite people according to their enrollment, each shall pay the Lord a ransom for himself on being enrolled, that no plague may come upon them through their being enrolled. This is what everyone who is enrolled in the records shall pay: a half-shekel by the sanctuary weight. . . . Everyone who is entered in the records from the age of twenty years up, shall give the Lord's offering: the rich shall not pay more and the poor shall not pay less than half a shekel when giving the Lord's offering as expiation for your persons. You shall take the expiation money from the Israelites as a remainder before the Lord, as an expiation for your persons. (Exod. 30:11-16)*

Umberto Cassuto has explained that the reason why the directions from the census were included at this point in the Bible was to indicate the course of the half-shekels of silver to be used in the construction of the Tabernacle as detailed in Exodus 38:25-28.¹ Cassuto sees the biblical census in the context of Near Eastern cultures, particularly the Akkadian. He translates verse 30:11 in Exodus as: "When you take the sum (literally 'head') and points out that the Akkadian for "crown of the head" corresponds to the Hebrew cognate used in verse 11. He states that, in Mesopotamia, the census had religious significance, due

apparently. . . to the fact that the census was considered a sin, implying, as it were, lack of faith in the deity; therefore, it was necessary to associate it with a ceremony of atonement and cleansing from sin.²

The Soncino Humash commentary on giving the half-shekel of silver per capita so as to avert a "plague," attributes the motive to superstition. "Anything

* All biblical quotations are from the Jewish Publication Society translation.

ERNEST NEUFELD is retired after a career encompassing journalism, law, and New York City government.

THE SINS OF THE CENSUS : 197

that is numbered is subject to the influence of the evil eye and its calamitous consequences.” And referring to the census ordered by King David, the commentator adds: “Why it should have been regarded as a sin is not clear.”³ W. Gunther Plaut observes that

until recently there was a feeling that knowing a person’s “number” was equivalent to knowing his essence, and such knowledge ultimately was a divine prerogative (e.g., knowing when “someone’s number was up”).⁴

Sir James G. Frazer traced the aversion to counting people to gross superstition common in many cultures. In his *Folklore in the Old Testament*, he devoted many pages to reviewing the notions behind the avoidance of enumerating persons and possession widespread among peoples of Africa, the Pacific, and Europe. These compromise bad luck, fear that evil spirits will hear and cause the death of some of them. He attributes these sentiments to the Israelites in biblical times, and says, contemptuously,

in the books of Samuel and Chronicles we learn that at one period in his career Jehovah cherished a singular antipathy to the taking of a census, which he appears to have regarded as a crime of even deeper dye than boiling milk or jumping on a threshold.

And he conjectures that the superstition among the Hebrews was seen as confirmed by an outbreak of plague following an enumeration.⁵

The wording of Exodus 30:11, “When you take a census . . . each shall pay the Lord’s ransom . . . that no plague may come upon them through their being enrolled . . .,” anticipates a census prior to the entry into Canaan. The purpose, then, is not that a census be taken now for military purposes, *per se*, but that each enrolled now pay the Lord’s ransom. The census is to be conducted now not because the men have to be mustered for imminent war but to collect the ransom of silver needed in the construction of the Tabernacle. Payment of the half-shekel of silver by each man listed provides an indirect count of the total number, but the method used is not to avoid a direct count; it is to assure that every man on the rolls for military service, while fulfilling his religious duty to expiate the sin that he may commit in battle—the taking of human life—makes possible the collection of sufficient silver for the construction of the Tabernacle.

The phrase, “that no plague may come upon them through their being enrolled,” should not be mistaken for a statement that the census count is the source of the sin, which if not expiated, would bring on a “plague.” The enrollment involves the potential participation of the warrior in taking human life, but is not the direct cause of killing, wherein lies the sin to be atoned for. The “plague,” rather than a general and widespread contagious disease, in fact may refer to outbreaks of communicable diseases in crowded military encampments. That the element of sin has no direct connection with taking a census is repeat-

edly attested by the many other censuses recorded in Scripture respecting which no mention of expiation is indicated. Neither are they followed by "plague."

In Numbers 1:1-3, when Moses is directed to enumerate all of the congregation of Israel, tribe by tribe, who are twenty years or older and capable of bearing arms, there is no stricture that those enrolled shall pay a "ransom" or otherwise expiate their sin. Nor are the other provisions in Numbers for listing the Levites and the firstborn (3:15, 40) accompanied by directions for expiation of sin. The Levites were substituted for the firstborn in being assigned exclusively for the service of the Lord in the Tabernacle (Num. 3:13, 25, 31, 36, 41, 44; 4:3, 23-24, 30 ff.). Significantly, the Levites were exempt from military duty and had to be ritually clean to attend to their services in the sanctuary. Yet there is no provision that they atone for any sin in connection with the censuses taken of them.

Except for the Levites and firstborn, the censuses were for military duty.⁶ Enumerations for army enrollment under various kings of Israel are recorded in many other places in Scripture. None of them was followed by any punishment, nor is there any reference regarding them as to expiation. David's sin is exceptional in that he is said to have sinned thereby and was punished.

It is instructive to compare the numbering of the males for military service ordered by David with that by Moses in the wilderness, preparatory to the conquest of the Promised Land and in the course of receipt of instructions for the construction of the Tabernacle. David's census (2 Sam. 24:1 ff.; 1 Chron. 21:1), is taken as he nears the end of his life. In passages reminiscent of those in Exodus, wherein it is said that the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, we read in 2 Samuel 24:1, "The anger of the Lord flared up against Israel; and he incited David against them, saying, 'Go and number Israel by Judah.'"

Accordingly, David directs Joab, the general of his army, to conduct a census. Joab objects. After the numbering is concluded, David is remorseful and tells the Lord, "I have sinned grievously," and seeks forgiveness (2 Sam. 24:10). But the Lord, he learns from the prophet Gad, has determined to punish him, giving him the choice of three inflictions—seven years of famine, flight from his enemies, three days of pestilence in the land. David chooses to "fall now into the hands of the Lord, for His compassion is great" (2 Sam. 24:14). There ensues a pestilence that causes the death of seventy thousand men in Israel (2 Sam. 24:15).

This is the census from which Frazer drew the conclusion that YHWH "cherished a singular antipathy toward census taking." Frazer manages in one sentence to make a misstatement regarding boiling milk and to ignore the important fact that even in this case where pestilence follows the census, the Lord, who is said to regard the census as a terrible sin, is the one who directs David to undertake it. It is clear from this very fact—i.e., the census is ordained by God—that the offense cannot lie in the conduct of the census but arises from some other source.

THE SINS OF THE CENSUS : 199

Support for this conclusion is to be found in Numbers 31, which deals with the campaign against the Midianites. Moses is instructed to conduct this second census in the wilderness by requiring each tribe to supply a thousand men (which necessarily had to involve a count by each tribal chief). He is further directed to see to it that part of the booty taken be devoted to the service of the Lord. The victorious Israelites find that they did not have a single casualty, and the warriors make an additional offering of their share of the booty "to make atonement for our souls before the Lord" (Num. 31:49-50). Surely, these offerings of expiation, coming *after* the fighting, were not for the expiation of a sin occasioned by their enrollment but for the blood that they shed in battle. The commanders tell Moses:

Your servants have made a check of the warriors in our charge, and not one of us is missing. So we have brought as an offering to the Lord such articles of gold as each of us came upon . . . that expiation may be made for our persons before the Lord.

In the context that their expiation offerings are made, any connection with taking of the census can be ruled out. What the commanders and their men are atoning for is the shedding of human blood in battle.

It is evident from this case that the expiatory offerings could not have been made before the campaign, since the Lord's command called for a share of the spoils to be devoted to His service. That could not possibly occur until after the campaign had been concluded and the warriors returned to camp. From the booty brought back, part was thus an expiatory offering. Consequently, we may infer that the expiation in advance was not the normal procedure, so that the advance payments as offerings collected in the first census conducted by Moses were the exception to the rule, necessitated by the urgent need for the silver.

The inevitable conclusion, therefore, is that though David did not provide in advance for atonement of the "sin" of the census, it would have been timely to have done so afterwards. But such is not the case, for immediately upon Joab's report of the count, David expresses his consciousness of having sinned. It is only after this that he is given a choice of punishments and the "plague" follows. If the sin did not have to be expiated beforehand or in connection with a census, and if no opportunity was given for atonement after it was completed, a sin for which there could be no forgiveness, then it could not have been a sin at all. Obviously, then, the chronicles of David's census are colored by elements not readily discernible but which it is possible to track down.

David's census differs from others in the Bible. Many difficulties attend comprehension of why (1) God's anger was aroused against Israel, (2) why David is told by God to conduct the census, for which terrible punishment is exacted, and (3) just who suffered from the "plague" as a result.

Some light on these questions is shed by a comparison of the two versions of David's census, the one in 2 Samuel and the other in 1 Chronicles. In the

former, as cited earlier, God orders David to “number Israel and Judah,” while the latter ascribes the impetus for the census to Satan (21:1). Read in isolation, the first account bears false witness to the conclusion that the census was sinful in itself, for, as argued above, it was divinely ordained. The second version, on the other hand, implies the contrary, namely, that the offense *is* in the count. It is Satan, not God, who spurred David to err.

The apparent contradiction in the two versions as to how David came to decide to hold the census, vanishes if the introductory sentences in the two are evaluated for what they are—not as part of sequential narratives of the events involved but as summary judgments on David at the very outset of the story. To put it another way, each version expresses a theological conclusion as to the ultimate cause. The first attributes it to God, for in the biblical view He is the final cause of everything. The second cannot tolerate the idea that God could authorize an action but exact punishment for it, and so assigns to Satan the evil impulse that led David to embark on the census.

Stripped of theological attribution, these sentences yield the bare fact that David ordered a census, for it could not have been ordered by God and also inspired by Satan. We must, therefore, read verse 1 in 2 Samuel 24, “And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel and Judah,” not as a command to commit a sin, nor that David was selected to be the means for the Lord’s punishment of the people, but as the chronicler’s interpretation of the consequences of the events set in motion by the census. The judgmental view of the census, as will be further explored, is an attempt to explain how David could have made a decision so dire in its consequences for the nation.

Elimination of the theological overlay removes the need to deal with the question of how a just God could impel an action and then mete out punishment for it. Rereading 2 Samuel 24:1, we can discern that the narrator is trying to account for how it could be that Israel was punished as it was, as well as why David ordered the census. The same is true in the case of 1 Chronicles 21:1. They parallel each other exactly. Furthermore, in both versions, Joab objects to David’s order. Clearly, he perceives it as David’s own idea, for how could he have voiced reservations if he understood that it had been commanded by God? Rather than being moved by superstitious fears, Joab’s remonstrances are prompted by a perception that David is moved to undertake the census out of other than military considerations. As a military commander, Joab is used to taking a census for conscription into the army but objects to the use of the military for conducting an enumeration for other purposes.

It is germane to note that if David’s putative sin stems from the census count itself, then it is he who should be, and is said to have been, punished. But in point of fact, the punishment, though David assumes the guilt, is exacted from the “people.” And this is in conformity with the expiation for sin offered by the individual enrollees at the time of Moses’ census to collect the silver shekels for the Tabernacle. That it is the individual soldiers who are deemed to

THE SINS OF THE CENSUS : 201

have sinned and not the authority ordering the enumeration, is conclusive evidence that the offense is not in the census itself.

Historians have offered possible rationales for David's resolve on a census. Graetz suggests that in the last decade of his life, David was considering "a comprehensive plan, apparently that of a great war which would require a numerous body of soldiers."⁷ If that had been David's purpose, however, he could not possibly have felt that he sinned in ordering the census. After all, he had engaged in many campaigns—against the Philistines, the Moabites, etc.—without specific mandate from the Lord. Furthermore, if a military venture was in contemplation, would the commander-in-chief object to ascertaining the available manpower on the basis that it would be "a cause of guilt for Israel" (1 Chron. 21:3)?

David had risen to power, waged his military campaigns, and maintained his authority largely with the support of a body of mercenaries owing allegiance only to him. He supplemented their number for the main force of his army by levies on the men of Judah—his own tribe—from the southern part of the country.⁸ And it was the northern tribes which had supported David's son, Absalom, in his attempt to depose David, a revolt that David had crushed some years before and in which Absalom had lost his life (2 Sam. 15:10-13; 18:1-18). It was followed by another revolt led by Sheba, of the tribe of Benjamin in the north (2 Sam. 20). There ensued a number of other wars (2 Sam. 21:18-20).

It is possible, then, that David who, once king, had striven to consolidate the unity of the kingdom and the security of his rule and dynasty, should have been deeply concerned in these last years of his life for the future of his house and the kingdom. He foresaw in the separatist tendencies of the tribes, as in their support of Absalom, and the revolt led by Sheba, that, in founding his main power on the tribe of Judah, he was abetting tribal divisiveness. An overview of David's efforts to consolidate his hold on the country, including the capture of Jerusalem, which had been assigned to no tribe and which he made his capital as well as the center for the worship of the Lord by erecting a Tabernacle there and bringing the Ark to it has been provided by Louis Finkelstein. He describes "David's famous census . . . [as] another phase in his struggle to restrict the autonomy of the tribes by placing them under a bureaucratic administration answerable only to the crown."⁹ In Salo W. Baron's opinion, "David's census . . . doubtless pursued military as well as fiscal objectives."¹⁰

Rather than being preoccupied by thoughts of preparing for a great war of conquest, David, we may thus gather, may have been intent, under the guise of a military census, primarily on establishing a firm administration over the entire realm.

If this summary of the historical context of David's census is a valid reconstruction of the problems of state faced by David, Joab's objection to the census becomes comprehensible on the level of political and military considerations. As commander of the army, he was cognizant of the disaffection in the

northern part of the country and may have feared the reaction to a military census when no hostile action against Israel appeared to be on the horizon. Such a census now threatened conscription into the army of discontents from the northern tribes and, simultaneously, would arouse those tribes against David's rule. His misgivings, as expressed in 2 Samuel, are in consonance with this interpretation. He concludes his reservations by saying, "but why should my lord king want this?" (2 Sam. 24:3). Surely, it is not that Joab does not appreciate the reasons which prompt David to have the census. Rather, he is concerned about the military and political consequences. The version of Joab's reply in Chronicles is loaded with editorial moralizing when he is quoted as saying, "Why should my lord require this? Why should it be a cause of guilt for Israel?" (1 Chron. 21:3). It is molded in the light of the pestilence which, by apparent coincidence, followed the census. It is part and parcel of the assignment of its cause as proclaimed in the first verse of the chapter, namely, that Satan moved David to number Israel. Another count is added to the indictment of David in charging him with ignoring the warning of Joab.

We turn now to the third question posed earlier, that is, who were smitten in the "plague" that followed David's census. The answer seems obvious, since the texts tell us they comprised seventy thousand men. And it is this obvious answer that needs examination. Was this an "ordinary" plague, indiscriminate as to its victims, which would indicate that the deaths were, indeed, due to a pestilential disease among the general population? And if it was, was it necessarily the consequence of taking the census?

It has been suggested that the plagues ascribed to census enumeration could have been based on the reality of outbreaks of communicable diseases in army camps. Two sources have been cited as authority for this conclusion, the first, 2 Samuel 24:15, and the second, 2 Kings 19:35. However, the first does not seem to be a substantiation for the pestilence is said to have taken its toll throughout the length and breadth of the country and was not confined to any one place. The verse in 2 Samuel reads: "So the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel . . . ; and there died of the people from Dan even to Beer-sheba seventy thousand men." But if we conceive the "plague" as a series of outbreaks accompanying the army as it made its way from Dan to Beer-sheba, it becomes persuasive and the deduction is strengthened in that the victims are stated to be men only.

The second citation refers to the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians when the Lord smote them as they slept in their camp so that the city was saved from the invaders. This example confirms the occurrence of pestilence in army camps in biblical times. Taken together, the two citations tend strongly to confirm the conclusion that the "plague" ascribed to David's census was confined to the army camps.

The total of the dead also bears examination. In connection with Moses' first census, Cassuto has demonstrated that "the numbers given in the Torah

THE SINS OF THE CENSUS : 203

are mostly round or symbolic figures” based on the sexagesimal system, supplemented by seven or a multiple of seven. To indicate a large number or amount, round figures, as for example, 600,000, 120,000, etc., were provided.¹¹ On this basis, the 70,000 dead in Israel attributed to David’s census, is but a round number to point up the horrendous consequence of his “sin.”

Based on the foregoing argumentation, reconstruction of the thinking animating the accounts of David’s census is possible along these lines. An unpopular census is discerned as a threat to the autonomy of the tribes and a prelude to forced labor and new taxes. The perception of such powerful centralized rule, coupled with current notions associating sin or evil effects with a head count, combined to damn the census. The plague said to have followed the census was considered as proof that it could have occurred only because God’s anger was stirred against Israel. Why? Because of David’s census. Or, alternatively, because Satan had induced David to order the census, which, of course, was a sin and had to be punished. It is a case of circuitous logic.

To summarize, expiation of the sin of taking a life or shedding blood, was well established among the Israelites. There was no superstitious fear of census-taking embodied in Scripture. Enumeration of the males not only was not prohibited but was commanded by God many times. The census at the time when the Tabernacle was to be erected was made well in advance in order to have the silver available for its construction, and it was not offered in expiation of any sin in connection with the census itself. Most likely, the coupling of the census and the offering of expiation for blood shed in battle, came in time to be mistakenly associated, instead, with the census itself.

The Bible teaches that life belongs to God, the Creator, and its taking is a sin against Him. Punishment may be averted by expiation of the sin through sacrifice, an offering to the Lord. The atonement for preventing “plague” was, in biblical terms, an offering to forestall possible epidemics when those enrolled were in camp.

What rendered David’s census open to association with sin was that those enrolled under it had not participated in battle nor taken human life but were visited, nevertheless, by pestilence. Since no blood had been shed and, therefore, expiation was not called for, in the popular mind the cause, or sin, had to be the census itself. We may infer then that in confessing that he sinned, David was not attributing it to the numbering itself but to having ordered it for a purpose which he discerned was not in accordance with the will of the Lord. Otherwise how could He have punished “His people”?

NOTES

1. *A Commentary on the Books of Exodus* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1987), p. 393.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 393.

204 : *Judaism*

3. *The Soncino Books of the Bible*, "Chumash," Rev. Dr. A. Cohen, ed. (London, 1971), p. 450; Samuel, p. 342.
4. *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981), p. 1035.
5. James G. Frazier, *Folklore in the Old Testament*, abridged ed. (Avenel Books, 1988), p. 307 ff.
6. 2 Chron. 14:7; 17:13-18; 25:15; 26:11-13; Josh. 8:10; 1 Sam. 11-8, 13-15, 15:4; 2 Sam. 18:1; 1 Kings 20:15, 26-27; 2 Kings 3:6.
7. Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1967), vol.1, p. 137.
8. Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), p. 60.
9. *The Jews: Their History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), 4th ed., vol.1, pp. 26-28.
10. *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1952), vol. 1, p. 84.
11. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, vol. 1 (1978), pp. 191, 256, 258 ff.

Revisiting My Father's Synagogue

ISMAR SCHORSCH

THOUGH I HAVE NO PERSONAL MEMORIES OF Hanover, I am acutely aware of my origins. I was born there on November 3, 1935, less than two months after Hitler's Nuremberg Laws stripped German Jews of their citizenship and of whatever illusions they might still have harbored about the reasonableness of the Nazi regime. My birth has always seemed to me not an act of folly but of defiance, an affirmation of faith by my parents in the midst of dark times. The Hebrew name *Yizhak*, which they gave me, means "he shall laugh," and bespoke their will to live and their hope in the future. In German they chose to call me Ismar, after Dr. Ismar Freund, the prominent brother of my father's senior colleague, Rabbi Samuel Freund, and the historian of the Jewish struggle for political emancipation in Prussia. In retrospect, my two names pointed beyond Nazi Germany, to the security and openness of American society, which would enable me to become a Jewish historian and, eventually, the head of the institutional successor to the Breslau Seminary at which both my father and Samuel Freund had once prepared themselves for the rabbinate.

The monumental Romanesque synagogue of Hanover, designed by Edwin Oppler and completed in 1870, was a vivid presence for me in my childhood in America. I would often stare curiously at the small sketch and photograph of it that hung in a single frame in our house. On occasion, my father spoke of its great beauty, near-perfect acoustics, and splendid collection of rabbinic responsa. He had come to Hanover in 1927 seeking a synagogue without an organ. Yet, the formal services never quite satisfied his need for religious intensity, and, on the joyous festival of Simhat Torah, which marks the end as well as the beginning of the annual liturgical cycle of reading the Torah, he would slip out early to visit one of the four East European *shtiblakh* (prayer houses) in the city to savor the fervor of their unadorned piety. It always reminded him of the unreflective Judaism of the Baden village from which he came. The city, with its overdose of human artifacts, tended to estrange one from God.

What he did cherish about the services of the community synagogue was the voice of Cantor Israel Alter, who was destined to become one of the great cantors of his generation. Born in Lemberg to a family of Belzer Hasidim, and

ISMAR SCHORSCH is Chancellor of The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. This paper was delivered in Hanover, Germany, on October 4, 1991, the place of the author's birth and in the pulpit of his father, on the occasion of the city's 750th anniversary.

trained in Vienna, Alter, with his rich baritone voice and unmatched mastery of both traditional and modern cantorial music, led the services in Hanover, from 1925 to 1935, when he left for South Africa.

We did not flee Germany until three years later, five weeks after *Kristallnacht* and a harrowing ten-day stay for my father in Buchenwald, of which he never spoke. Until then he had always resisted the idea of leaving his flock unattended. What was left of Oppler's grand edifice—the two towers alongside the main entrance—he saw only when he returned from Buchenwald. The rest had been reduced to rubble. Throughout Germany, in the span of a few days, the Nazis had razed no less than 267 synagogues, desecrated nearly every Jewish cemetery in the country, plundered some 7,500 stores and 180 dwellings, sent a total of 30,000 Jews to concentration camps, and killed at least 91 others.

The magnitude of the Holocaust has come to obscure the depravity of *Kristallnacht*—a euphemism of doubtful origin, which singles out the glass smashed that night. Yet, the event is worthy of commemoration, because it showed for all to see the inherent extremism of the Nazi revolution. An ideology ready to torch synagogues would be undeterred by genocide. The desecration of sacred space foreshadowed the destruction of human life.

Since time immemorial, civilized societies had respected the sanctity of altars and temples. Pockets of transcendence in a profane world, they also provided security for valuables and asylum for people in trouble. Even conquerors sought to avoid the suspicion of sacrilege. According to the historian Josephus, the Roman general Titus labored in vain to spare the renowned Temple of Jerusalem during his final assault on the city in the year 70. Similarly, when the Vandals, under Gaiseric, sacked Rome in 455, they did not plunder the churches. And today, in any country of the Western world, when modern vandals defile a house of God, decent people of all stripes react with swift outrage.

German Jewry conducted its religious services in over 1,300 synagogues. Many were imposing buildings built during the nineteenth century, with the gradual removal of medieval disabilities. To violate these sanctuaries gave notice to the world that no moral constraints would inhibit Nazism in its campaign against Jews. That night, fire brigades stood by only to prevent the flames from spreading to nearby Aryan property, while police patrolled the streets merely to keep a semblance of order. As the sovereignty of the modern state sank into acts of sheer madness, the world observed in silence. In the words of the British historian Ian Kershaw, "The road to Auschwitz was built by hate, but paved with indifference."

Twenty-five years after *Kristallnacht* my father returned to Hanover for the first and last time. He had been invited to give the dedicatory address at the opening of the city's new synagogue on November 10, 1963. Flush with emotion and no longer entirely at home in German, he uncharacteristically read his manuscript on the lessons to be learned from the Nazi nightmare. The new

REVISITING MY FATHER'S SYNAGOGUE : 207

synagogue, located at a different site and built on an infinitely smaller scale than Oppler's masterpiece, would serve a community diminished beyond recognition, and barely viable.

But, financed by the governments of the city of Hanover and the state of Lower Saxony, the synagogue also offered an admission of collective guilt and a plea for reconciliation. The moral courage of Konrad Adenauer, to accept Germany's responsibility for the Holocaust by agreeing to reparations, had begun to stir other Germans to search for adequate expressions of remorse. Today, the study of Jewish history and culture are no strangers, as they once were, to the German university; towns and cities across the country invite at their expense former Jewish residents for a visit, and support financially the vestiges of Jewish life in their midst; national churches regularly affirm their anguish over the fate of Jews under the Nazis; Germans visit Israel and study at its universities; and the ever-growing number of serious German books on Jewish subjects once again makes the German language an indispensable tool for students of Judaica. While the Holocaust remains a crime without parallel, no nation has made a more genuine effort to atone for its inhumanity.

This record of moral leadership must not be diminished by the pressures unleashed since the end of the Cold War and the achievement of German unification. From its eastern border, Germany looks out on a land expanse of exhilarating political potential, crushing economic backwardness, and exploding ethnic tensions. At the moment, Germany is still the least nationalistic state in Europe. If it can manage to preserve that temperate and inclusive tone, despite great domestic strain, it shall offer the nations of the East not only a generous source of economic aid, but also an invaluable political model.

As a historian of German Jewry, I find the grandeur of Oppler's synagogue, with its soaring central cupola, numerous towers, and rose windows, making it the most prominent piece of Jewish architecture in Hanover, symbolic of the modern synagogue as a whole, the product of Judaism's adaptation to modernity. The German synagogue, as it emerged in the nineteenth century, had almost as little to do with the medieval synagogue as did the ancient synagogue with the Temple. Continuity in name concealed a world of difference. The German synagogue embodied a new religious institution, which differed from what came before in terms of content, form, and, above all, function. To study its component parts in isolation of each other is to overlook the novelty and significance of the institution as a whole and to miss the major contribution of German Jewry to the development of modern Judaism.

In the words of Leopold Zunz, who is as much the founder of the modern synagogue as he is the historian of the medieval, the German synagogue was to be a "reconciliation of the genuine piety of the East and the genuine culture of the West." What this meant in practice, when the separate strands merged, was a shortened Hebrew liturgy recited in unison and solemnity to the harmonious chords of Western music, often with benefit of an organ. A transformed cantorate

and rabbinate now led the congregation from the front of the synagogue, with a formal German sermon as the centerpiece of the service. The discord and sounds of individual prayer which had filled the medieval synagogue, where the rabbi played no role, were banished as “oriental,” along with the traditional cantillation for the reading of the Torah or even the calling to the Torah of individual congregants. Women continued to sit in the balcony, but they came in even greater numbers, prompting balconies of much greater size in newer synagogues.

Architecturally, the German synagogue quickly reached a beauty and prominence undreamed of amid the insecurity of the Middle Ages. For the first time, Jews had to cast about for a suitable exterior for their sanctuaries, which, in the past, had usually been nondescript. The Moorish style prevailed, I believe, because it accorded with the Sephardic mystique that mesmerized an Ashkenazic community eager to distance itself from its brethren further east. Oppler disagreed. One of the first Jewish architects to design a synagogue, he believed it ought to be marked by a German style that gave voice to German Jewry’s sense of at-homeness. Since Gothic was indisputably Christian, he proposed Romanesque, and the new synagogue in Hanover became the first in Germany to adopt that style. But, irrespective of style, each new synagogue enunciated Jewish confidence in the permanence of emancipation, even as it made the case for Judaism as an advanced religion—indeed, the very equal of Christianity.

Finally, in terms of function, the German synagogue grew to be nearly coterminous with Judaism itself. Physical prominence came to reflect religious importance. Not only had emancipated Judaism been largely recast in the mold of Christianity, but the synagogue ended up as the last arena in which it was practiced, and quite differently from before. It was no longer just a place to *daven*, to pray with a *minyan*, to discharge a divine obligation without fanfare. It operated now primarily as a medium for transmitting the essence of Judaism to a congregation that was Jewishly illiterate and reluctant to abide by much more. The early introduction of the confirmation ceremony for teenagers foreshadowed the function of the institution for adults—to retain and fortify the loyalty of Jews for whom Judaism had been reduced to a creed. Religious commitment was to be insured through the cultivation of the senses. The synagogue, with its panoply of new resources, had become an instrument of advocacy for the perpetuation of Judaism.

To be sure, not everyone accepted the new centrality of the synagogue. For example, Samson Raphael Hirsch, founder of neo-Orthodoxy, condemned the exclusive and unprecedented role assumed by the modern synagogue.

In a time of such serious deviation as ours, the most promising cure might be the most radical and sweeping: we should close for a century all synagogues. Oh Jewish heart, do not be alarmed by this prospect. With the closing of all synagogues not even one-thousandth part of God’s law would be affected. . . . For Jews to close all synagogues would be the loudest protest against the denial of God’s law in life and home: Judaism must be sought elsewhere than in the synagogue; the center of Judaism does not lie in the synagogue.

REVISITING MY FATHER'S SYNAGOGUE : 209

In accord with that conviction, Hirsch proposed to build a school rather than a synagogue when he came to Frankfurt in 1851. Generally, the Orthodox rabbinate fought, with modest success, to defy the pressures of the age by stressing the traditional primacy of education and promoting separate Jewish schools. Similarly, in 1917, when the young Rosenzweig challenged Hermann Cohen with a reaffirmation of the centrality of Jewish learning, he was driven to speak out by the lamentable reality that, for most Jews in the synagogue, the prayerbook—despite its fluent German translation—was a sealed and inert volume.

Like the ancient synagogue, its modern counterpart was the product of a radically altered political situation. As long as Jews lived on the periphery of the body politic, apart and unequal, their houses of worship were inner-directed, immune to Christian sentiment and fearful of ornate public display. But the prospect and reality of emancipation put a premium on divesting Jews of their nationhood and their quality of being wholly other. As early as 1832, Zunz pointed to the nexus between the achievement of citizenship and the need for a transformed synagogue, when he ringingly declared:

Total emancipation needs total reform, one that will become visible only in institutions that protect both faith and scholarship and transmit without corruption the heritage of the fathers to the sons. The absence of such contemporary institutions is felt most urgently in that place which is the expression of Jewish nationality, the guarantor of its religious existence—namely, in the synagogue.

Zunz's lifelong scholarship on the history of the medieval synagogue—in particular, its vast homiletical and liturgical literature—elevated the institution into the bearer of Jewish national consciousness, and equipped the modern synagogue with a gloriously usable past. Nationhood had been neutralized by incorporating it into the synagogue, which now became the basic construct of Jewish continuity for both past and present.

In the context of emancipation, political, economic, and cultural factors converged to refashion the synagogue. In Central Europe, the policy of extending equality piecemeal intensified the pressure to give ever fresh evidence that Judaism posed no threat to either Gentile society or Jewish integration. New economic opportunities competed for the time formerly devoted under more circumscribed conditions to living by the manifold dictates of Jewish law. And the increasing exposure to German culture in the era of its ascendancy recast Jewish sensibilities. In consequence, as other arenas of Jewish life withered, the synagogues emerged as emancipated Judaism's main line of defense, a conspicuously public institution designed to disarm critics and to reconnect those whose faith had waned.

But to focus exclusively on the modern synagogue in Central Europe as the sole platform for Jewish expression, is to distort the truth. The local synagogue was always complemented and controlled by the survival from the pre-

emancipation era of the corporate Jewish community. An institution of self-governance legally recognized by the state, it constituted the political substratum of Jewish life in a given locality. It also enjoyed formidable power by virtue of the obligation upon every local Jew to register as a member, and its right to tax its membership.

In the comprehensive law of 1847, organizing Jewish life, the Prussian government referred to the local Jewish community as a *Synangogengemeinde* (synagogue community), clearly implying that Judaism had fully merged with the synagogue. The term replaced the pejorative word *Judenschaft* (body of Jews) that had been used in earlier drafts. And, indeed, Jews were already well along in the process of limiting Judaism to the confines of the synagogue. Yet, it is one of the supreme ironies of the Jewish experience in Germany that unsympathetic bureaucrats and politicians, pressing hard to convert Judaism into a religion, preserved the communal structure which contributed to the survival of a vestigial sense of Jewish national consciousness. By the twentieth century, militant Zionists tried to mobilize the discontent of both Orthodox and East European Jews to turn communal elections in several cities into hotly contested political battles. The vision of a community based on nationhood rather than religion was coming into full view. In truth, it had always been there, even when the public rhetoric was constricted to a solely religious vocabulary.

In the nineteenth century, the *Synangogengemeinde* played a vital role in moderating the drive to fragment and exclude that came with the domination of the synagogue. For one thing, the local community provided a framework for the secular Jew who refused to convert but was bereft of all religious sentiment. German state legislation impeded his departure, dictated his financial support for the welfare of the entire community, and gave him the chance to express inoffensively a sense of belonging.

Secondly, communal constraints tempered religious reform. It is precisely their absence in nineteenth-century America, where the congregation became the primary building block of Jewish life, that gave free reign to individual synagogues to make practice conform to belief. In Germany, with a single synagogue often serving the population of an entire community, the need to gain consensus encouraged the adoption of moderate reforms. Frequently, the erection of a new building was the occasion for protracted debate over innovation in the liturgy or synagogue practice. In older communities, with a sense of their past, respect for local custom intensified still further the resistance toward wholesale change.

Finally, as urban Jewish populations skyrocketed and synagogues proliferated, the community gravitated toward a policy of benevolent neutrality. In the spirit of religious pluralism, it funded the expenses of synagogues of diverse persuasion, enabling Jews of all three religious movements to find their place within a united communal structure. The *Einheitsgemeinde* of Central Europe (the single all-inclusive local synagogue) is one of the great organiza-

REVISITING MY FATHER'S SYNAGOGUE : 211

tional achievements of Jewish history. Courageous and pragmatic leadership refused to allow the new reality of religious diversity to override the ancient value of collective unity. The small number of Orthodox synagogues to follow Hirsch after 1876, in his ideological campaign to secede from communities governed by Liberal Jews, is eloquent testimony to the appeal and effectiveness of the *Einheitsgemeinde*. At the local level, German Jewry had effected an enlightened accommodation between its secular and religious sectors that enhanced the stability of both and, thereby, bequeathed a legacy of urgent relevance for modern Israel.

Not long ago, the reworked facade of the old Oranienburger Street Synagogue in East Berlin was completed and formally presented to Jewish leaders by city officials. Erected in 1866, this grand specimen of Moorish architecture had, remarkably, survived the Nazi ordeal as a bombed-out hulk of charred masonry. For decades, its useless walls offered a haunting epitaph to the thriving community which once assembled within to intone God's name. Today, its restored facade preserves no more than the frontispiece of a desecrated book, which, if whole, would tell the story of Judaism's initial encounter with modernity.

The Vanished World of Egyptian Jewry

VICTOR D. SANUA

I WAS BORN IN CAIRO IN 1920 INTO A MIDDLE-class Jewish family. My father, too, was born in Cairo, and my mother, born in Turkey, was brought to Cairo as a teenager. Both of my parents were of Sephardic origin. However, my father had acquired Italian citizenship from his father, which made me legally an Italian citizen as well. This seeming anomaly was the result of an agreement, arrived at approximately one hundred years earlier, whereby the rulers of Egypt accepted arrangements for all foreigners and their children to derive their legal status from the consul of the country of their origin. This system of foreign protection came to be called the Laws of Capitulations and originated under the Ottomans. Capitulations were treaties of commerce guaranteeing that the interests of foreigners immigrating to Egypt would be safeguarded by their own consuls, and they would not be taxed. However, since this led to a chaotic legal situation, so-called Mixed Courts were established in 1885 to handle litigation between a foreigner and an Egyptian. It is understandable why foreigners living for several generations in Egypt maintained the citizenship of their country of origin. In many instances, Jews were able to obtain foreign citizenship; foreign powers did not mind having a larger representation of persons bearing their own passports. The Capitulations were eliminated in 1937 (in the Treaty of Montreux) and taxation was imposed on foreign businesses. Individual taxation came later.

While my family claimed Italian citizenship, their first language was French. French influence dated back to Napoleon's conquest of Egypt in the latter part of the eighteenth century and to the later establishment of French schools throughout the Middle East, including Egypt. My family was also fluent in Ladino, a type of archaic Spanish which included many French, Turkish, and Hebrew words with Spanish endings. Many of the old-timers wrote Ladino in Hebrew (Rashi) script. This was not a language which was systematically studied like French but was acquired in the home and used with family members and friends of similar background. Most of the Jews in Egypt spoke Arabic at different levels of competence, but very few learned literary Arabic, which required years of study and was not used in common communication. Colloquial Arabic was used primarily with service people, such as maids, waiters, and shopkeepers.

Prior to the arrival in Egypt of foreign Jews during the middle of the nineteenth century, there was a small number of indigenous Jews (*Musta'arbin*) who had lived in the country for centuries and whose mother tongue was Ara-

VICTOR D. SANUA is *Affiliate Research Professor in the Department of Psychology at St. John's University in New York City.*

THE VANISHED WORLD OF EGYPTIAN JEWRY : 213

bic. They were considered *dhimmis*, that is, protected people under Islam, a kind of second-class citizenship. Christians were subject to the same status. *Dhimmis* had to pay heavy taxes called *jizya* and were exempt from military service.

Prior to the destruction of the Second Temple, Jewish civilians and mercenaries had settled on the island of Elephantine in the Upper Nile and had formed a frontier garrison for the protection of the Pharaohs against outside invaders. In later centuries, following the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great, Jews became prominent in Alexandria. The community was strongly Hellenized but maintained its Jewish faith. Its members participated in and contributed to Greek cultural life. This was the time when the Bible was translated into Greek (the Septuagint) and when Philo wrote his philosophical treatises. Later, under the occupation by the Romans, the enmity between the Jews and Greeks led to a revolt, and the Romans destroyed the Jewish community (115-117 C.E.) The revolt was instigated by Christian Greeks who conducted a number of pogroms. Jewish life in Alexandria subsequently disappeared.

In 640, Egypt was conquered by Arabs from the Arabian Peninsula under the banner of Muhammad, who established a new religion, Islam. Little information about Jews in Egypt in the years between that conquest and the end of the tenth century is available. In 960, the Fatimids (Shi'ite Muslims) conquered the country and a period of relative but inconsistent prosperity followed. The Fatimids relaxed the Laws of Omar, but some rulers were less tolerant than others. The Laws of Omar consisted of a series of acts of degradation, such as wearing signs indicating Jewishness and prohibitions against riding horses and bearing arms. During the Fatimid period there was some intellectual activity until the time when the Mamelukes assumed power (1250). The following centuries saw the social improvement of the Egyptian Jewish community (as recorded in the Geniza documents). A number of Spanish Jews expelled from the Iberian peninsula in 1492 alighted in Egypt, but most of them settled in the Ottoman Empire.

One of the illustrious leaders of the Cairo Jewish community was Maimonides (1135-1204), who was born in Cordova, Spain, but fled from the Almohadic (Muslim) persecution. The Mameluke rule was followed by persecution of both Jews and Christians and continued until 1517, when the Ottoman Turks conquered Egypt. Early in their occupation, at the height of their power, the Turks tended to be more tolerant. Most of the finances of Egypt were in the hands of Jews, who were appointed as *chelebi* (gentlemen). However, the decline of the Turkish Empire, with its wars against Russia, correlates with the decline of the Jewish community. Many *chelebi* were executed by Turkish governors either because of slander by their entourage or because of jealousy of the Jewish wealth.

In 1798, Egypt was conquered by Napoleon, and while the French occupation was short-lived (1798-1801), it left a strong imprint on the Westerniza-

tion of the country. Shortly thereafter, Muhammad Ali, a former Albanian officer in the service of the Turks, took over the reins of power. He ruled the country from 1805-1848 and established his own dynasty; King Faruk was his great-great-grandson. Faruk was forced to abdicate in 1952 after a military coup under the leadership of Muhammad Naguib and Gamal Abdal Nasser. Muhammad Ali's decision to modernize the country led to an influx of foreigners, who provided the necessary training of his army to defeat the Turks at a later period. A greater influx took place during the building of the Suez Canal in the 1860s, under Said and later under Khedive Ismail, the grandson of Muhammad Ali. Because of the latter's excessive modernization programs and indebtedness to foreign powers, Egypt was occupied by the British in 1882, and the shares of the Suez Canal were used to pay the debts. This brought greater prosperity to those Jews involved in commerce, banking, and railroads.

At the turn of the century, there were approximately 25,000 Jews living in Egypt, divided into four groups. The first, the indigenous Jews, spoke Arabic and lived in a secluded area in Cairo called Haret el Yahoud (the Jewish quarter). The second group, European Jews of Sephardic origin, were dominant and conducted their businesses of banking, manufacturing, and real estate in French, although many of them also spoke Ladino. This group included Jews from Italy and Corfu, as well as North Africa and the Levant. The third group was relatively small; it consisted of Ashkenazi Jews who had fled the pogroms of Russia and arrived in poverty, but who very shortly were able to participate in the economy of the country. Some had come from Palestine during World War I, forced out of the country by Turkey, Germany's ally. In Cairo they maintained their separate rabbinate; Yiddish was their principal language. In other cities Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews were under one rabbinate. The Sephardic rabbi in Cairo represented all Jewry to the Egyptian government. The fourth group were the Karaites, a sect established in the eighth century, which accepted only the authority of the Bible and rejected rabbinic writings. By 1947, Jews in Egypt reached their highest number. It is estimated that the total was approximately 80,000, 96 percent residing in the two major cities, Cairo (64 percent) and Alexandria (32 percent). In spite of their low numbers in the total population (0.4 percent), their contribution to the economy of the country was considerable.

Most of the Jews in Egypt received their education in foreign schools, primarily French secular schools (*Lycées Français*) and schools established by the Collège des Frères, a Catholic order. Professional training and higher education were obtained abroad. Few Jews of European origin were able to attend the Egyptian universities; since they had not mastered written Arabic, they could not be admitted, in spite of the fact that English and French were widely used, particularly in the sciences, medicine, and law. I myself attended the Collège des Frères, where almost half the students were Jewish. The language of instruction for all courses was French. Arabic and English were taught as

THE VANISHED WORLD OF EGYPTIAN JEWRY : 215

second languages two to three hours a week. There were a number of elementary Jewish communal schools, but only children of modest means attended them. In these schools, too, French was the dominant language, with Hebrew secondary. In Cairo there was also a small afternoon school (Talmud Torah) attached to the main synagogue, teaching Hebrew and Bible. Talmudic academies did not exist. Those seeking further religious education or rabbinical training had to go to the island of Rhodes, which was part of Italy before World War II. The influence of French education had the tendency to detach young Jewish people from their Arab environment.

Life for Egyptian Jews was quite comfortable. Practically all could afford to keep servants and to vacation regularly at the resort beaches in Alexandria and Port Said. There were also recreational clubs like the Union Universelle de la Jeunesse Juive and the Judéo-Espagnole (later changed to Judéo-Egyptienne). I and a group of friends from the Collège des Frères organized a boys' club called the Jewish Camping Club; we would go on weekend trips to places like the Pyramids, Meadi, Helwan (Spa), Suez, the Mokattam mountains, and the Fayyum oasis south of Cairo. Most Jews, except for those living in the Haret el Yahoud, considered themselves secular Jews. Jewish learning was minimal; bar-mitzvah preparation, for instance, consisted of a few months of instruction by a private tutor.

Most of the large department Egyptian stores were owned by Jews, with names like Cicurel, Oresco, Chemla, Gattegno, Ades, Cohenca, Simon-Artz, Morums, and Benzion. A notable exception was the Sednaoui store, which was owned by Christian immigrants from Syria but whose employees were largely Jewish. Most of these names are still to be found gracing Cairo storefronts, despite the fact that today the Jewish community in Egypt is almost extinct.

In the '20s and '30s, when I was growing up, we rarely personally experienced any anti-Semitism. To be sure, we knew that anti-Jewish feeling was part of the Egyptian historical legacy and could, at any time, break out again; but in general, Jews felt secure under British rule. However, once the British were forced out of the country (in 1954), this sense of ease evaporated. Even before the British evacuation, I saw the writing on the wall and, during World War II, registered my family at the American Embassy for purposes of immigration to the United States. At the time this was not considered a wise move on my part.

The first serious inkling of things to come occurred on November 2, 1945, the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration. Some minor anti-Jewish agitation had broken out in 1938, but in 1945, members of the youth organization Young Egypt and of the Moslem Brotherhood attacked the Jewish quarter in Cairo, resulting in many casualties. They set fire to a synagogue, demolished a Jewish hospital, an old-age home, and other Jewish institutions. It was the beginning of the end of the Jewish, as well as the foreign, communities. A combination of factors led to their demise. With industrialization, a new Egyptian social class

had developed, causing tension between them and Jews and Christians in the country. While Zionist activities were tolerated in the past, the defeat of Arab armies during the Israeli-Arab wars was instrumental in exacerbating anti-Jewish feelings. Moreover, Muslim fundamentalism contributed substantially to the prevailing xenophobia. After each war, Jewish property was confiscated and Jews were imprisoned in concentration camps or forced into exile, leaving behind their assets. Regular travel abroad became a problem since exit visas were required.

In 1947, the Company Law was enacted, mandating all business enterprises to maintain a majority of "Egyptian nationals," 75 percent of all salaried employees in offices and 90 percent of all workers in factories. The term "Egyptian nationals" was often interpreted to mean only Muslims and the law even discriminated against the indigenous Christians, the Copts. Since a large number of enterprises were controlled by foreigners, many found themselves forced to fire their non-Egyptian employees. In 1948, in spite of the fact that I was working for a Jewish firm, I was discharged because of my Italian citizenship. Some Jews tried to obtain Egyptian citizenship, but this was difficult since it was necessary to prove that one's parents and grandparents had been born in the country, and many, of course, did not qualify.

Now began the new exodus of the Jews from Egypt. Following the 1948 Israeli-Arab war, 20,000 to 30,000 Jews, who could no longer obtain employment, left the country. Because foreign businesses and institutions were exempt from the Company Law, I was able at first to work for a business representing the Communist government of Hungary; later I joined the staff of the American Friends Services Committee, which was involved in helping Palestinian refugees in Gaza. I remained there until 1949, by which time the refugee question changed from a humanitarian problem to one of a political nature. In 1952 Nasser came to power. Egyptian nationalism intensified, and the decisive blow to Egyptian Jewry was struck in 1956 when Israel, France, and England attacked Egypt after the country had nationalized the Suez Canal. There were mass arrests, sequestrations, and ill treatment not only of Jews but also of French and British citizens. Within a few months, another 40,000 to 50,000 Jews left the country; all their assets, including property, were confiscated. In 1967 there were about 3,000 Jews left. By the 1980s the number had dwindled to about 200. At the present time it is estimated that only 100 or so old people still remain in Egypt.

The Egyptian Jewish emigrants scattered throughout the world. They settled in Israel (35,000); Brazil (15,000); France (10,000); the U.S.A. (9,000); Argentina (9,000); and Great Britain (4,000). A few very rich Egyptian Jews and non-Jews managed to become residents of Switzerland. Thus, within the space of a few years, the Egyptian Jewish community, which had been in existence for 2,500 years, in effect ceased to exist. I myself had already left Egypt in 1950.

Following the signature of the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt in

THE VANISHED WORLD OF EGYPTIAN JEWRY : 217

1979, a number of Egyptian Jews were able to return to Egypt for visits. There were many reports of poor social conditions in Egypt and the deterioration of services since the departure of the foreign communities. Almost thirty years of hostilities against Israel and the excessive military expenditures had seriously affected the infrastructure of the country. Visitors to Egypt were told they could not drink the water because of pollution, and that only bottled drinks were safe. In my day there was no such problem. Cairo then was a relatively clean and well-ordered city, with a population of 2,250,000. The number has since grown to 14 or 15 million, with all the consequent urban deterioration.

I was reluctant to visit the city of my birth and would have preferred not to disturb my memories of Cairo as it was in the 1920s, '30s, and '40s. However, not long ago, my daughter was attending the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and while I was visiting her, she expressed a desire to see Egypt and asked me to accompany her. When I balked, she announced that she would go anyway, but that without me the trip would not be as meaningful. Her argument was convincing.

I did not expect us to meet any Jews I had known from before, since all were gone, but I looked forward to visiting the synagogue where I had my bar mitzvah and which I used to attend frequently with my father. During the two days we spent in Cairo, we went sightseeing during the day and at night visited the familiar places of my youth. On the first day we set out by bus for the Pyramids, driving slowly past village after village. We were in heavy traffic all the way and the trip took almost two hours. I remember that as a teenager, I used to ride my bicycle out to the Pyramids; the trip then, non-stop there and back, could be accomplished in only one hour.

We visited the street where I was born, Sharia (Street) Tursina. The street sign, covered by years of grime, was hardly visible. The elevators in my old apartment building were not functioning; a person coming down the stairs told us that the elevators had not been working for years. We also paid a visit to the Catholic school of my early education. Nothing in the building had changed. The familiar playground was still in its old location, but it was much smaller than I had remembered. Unlike in my day, Arabic was now the chief language of instruction, and there were very few foreigners in the school.

Next we visited the American University in Cairo, where I did my undergraduate work. The school was housed in a former palace and was sufficient to accommodate all the academic needs of the day. Now the old palace was being used as the administration building. A whole new campus had grown up in the surrounding open spaces in the meantime, with many new buildings. The student body, of course, had grown accordingly. No surprise, since the American University is the only place in Egypt where it is possible to obtain a liberal education.

Many of the streets of Cairo had been named after illustrious citizens who bore noble titles of Turkish origin, like Pasha or Bey. Such titles were

eliminated with the establishment of the Egyptian Republic after the departure of King Faruk. Most of the street names were then changed to reflect the new conditions. For example, I used to live on Sharia Malika Farida, named after Faruk's first wife. When he divorced her, the name was changed to Abdel Khalet Saroit Pasha. Now, dropping the title, it is called simply Abdel Khalet Saroit. The main street of Cairo, Sharia Fuad I, named after Faruk's father (all the names of the royal family began with *F*), was changed to the Street of the 6th of July, to commemorate an important date in modern Egyptian history. Suleiman Pasha, another major Cairo thoroughfare, also had undergone a transformation. Originally named after a French officer in the army of Muhammad Ali, a converted Christian who rose to eminence in Egyptian politics, the street was now called Sharia Harb.

On Sharia Fuad there used to be, as I recalled, a famous pastry shop, Tseppas, which was one of our favorite spots for cake. I was pleased to see that the shop was still there under its old name. A scion of the Tseppas family had been a classmate of mine at the Collège des Frères, and I therefore asked the pastry-shop attendant if there were any Tseppases still around. He told me, with a smile, that they had left the country a long time ago. Sharia Fuad was also the location of two favorite ice-cream parlors and restaurants called "A l'Américaine." The establishments were still there, under their old name, but their former sparkle, at least to me, was no longer in evidence. For old-times' sake, I took my daughter to Groppi's, a combination pastry shop, restaurant, and nightclub owned by Greeks. In its heyday it was the major meeting place of the then jet set; now it is a run-down café where people drink tea or coffee and play backgammon.

Our visit fell over a weekend and on Saturday morning my daughter and I went to the Sha'ar Ha-Shamayim synagogue, commonly called Temple Ismailiah, where I had my bar mitzvah. To my surprise, given all the changes, most for the worse, that I had seen so far, the synagogue was as beautiful and resplendent as when I had left Egypt in 1950. We were told that the synagogue had become the recipient of a handsome donation by Nissim Gaon, a rich Swiss businessman born in the Sudan, for the purpose of renovation and upkeep. I entered the sanctuary with great emotion, for this was where my father used to take me on Sabbaths and holidays. I remembered very clearly the beautiful singing of our cantor, who was originally from Czechoslovakia. I also recalled the sermons of our rabbi, Haim Nahum Effendi, who served between 1925-1961. He was totally blind and a *shamash* (beadle) always had to remind him when to call a halt to his sermon, since he habitually lost track of time.

There were only six old men present in the synagogue. They were waiting for the necessary *minyan* before they could start the service. My daughter sat down next to me, and one of the old men gestured to her to go sit on the other side of the main aisle, to preserve the traditional separation of the sexes. The upper balcony, suitably curtained, the usual women's section, was empty.

THE VANISHED WORLD OF EGYPTIAN JEWRY : 219

Finally three (male) tourists arrived, one by one, and now, with the requisite number of ten men in place, the service could begin. This certainly contrasted with the days when if we were late, there would be standing-room only. The synagogue was without a rabbi, the last one having left in 1972. The octogenarian conducting the service was almost blind and seemed to be reciting the text more from memory than with reference to the prayerbook. I was deeply gratified when I was offered an aliyah and called to the Torah.

After the service was over, I approached the gabbai and inquired about the Jewish cemetery called Bassatim, where my parents were buried and whose graves I wanted to visit. The gabbai only spoke Arabic, but we somehow managed to communicate. I was made to understand that it would be very difficult to locate the graves, since most of the marble memorial slabs had been taken away and used for construction. He discouraged my going to the cemetery, since it would be impossible to identify the graves. Reluctantly, I conceded that he was right.

The Bereshit Song

JEFFREY M. COHEN

THE CREATION OF THE WORLD IS MADE TANTALIZINGLY simple in the opening chapter of Genesis.

When one considers the true complexity of it all, as so many branches of science are now revealing with every passing day in countless laboratories throughout the developed countries, with research into astrophysics, the physical and chemical sciences, the amazing complexity of the genetic DNA structure of man—when one considers what we have already discovered, and yet what remains to be fathomed, we are forced to conclude that the opening chapter of Genesis was never intended to be scientifically instructive, or even descriptive, of any reality that goes beyond its opening verse: *Bereshit bara' Elohim*—"In the beginning it was God Who created the heavens and the earth."

Indeed every *single* word in that verse defies definition.

Bereshit—"In the beginning." How can we speak of, let alone define, "the beginning" in relation to God? If He is God, and, as such, has existed *from* eternity, then how can we speak of any "beginning"? Eternity has no beginning; no time frame! And if, as some commentators suggest, we have to understand the opening verse as linked to the following verse, construing them together as, "At the beginning *of the creation of* (bero') *heaven and earth*, the earth was empty and void"—then we may justifiably ask what took God so long? Was the Universe an afterthought, and, if so, what prompted its creation?

If we cannot answer that question, then surely we can never ever explain the purpose of life, or, indeed, justify human existence. Indeed, if we cannot answer that, then Kohelet's skeptical conclusion, that "the preeminence of man over beast is a myth, for all is vanity," might well have an authentic ring! And, conversely, if the universe was *not* an afterthought, then surely it must also have been coeval with the Creator Himself, namely, *eternal*. And if that was the case, then again we ask, what sense can we make of the term *bereshit*, "In the beginning"?

Then the word *bara'*, "He created."

Can we truly make any sense of that concept in the context of our opening remarks regarding the unique complexity of every atom and molecule, organism and microorganism, that inheres in every component and tissue of physical matter? What does "created" connote to us, to the ordinary reader of this verse who is not a microbiologist or physicist? So why even attempt to *describe* the six or seven "days" or stages of creation? What can that chronological information do to enhance our insights? Truly not a thing.

JEFFREY M. COHEN is the Minister of the Stanmore and Canons Park Synagogue in London.

THE BERESHIT SONG : 221

To proceed to the end of that first verse: *et hashamayim ve'et ha-'aretz*, "heaven and earth."

Are we any the wiser? Does the word "heaven" mean His Divine abode? If so, surely *that* also must have been coeval with God's existence, for wherever He *was*, was His abode!

And if we reply that *et hashamayim ve'et ha-'aretz* means, simply, the universe, then our difficulty remains: for how can we have any authentic, or even vague, conception, of a universe that we are told is in a constant state of expansion?

So we see that, at the very threshold of our Torah, we are brought face to face with one of the axioms of life, namely, the many obstacles to man's comprehension of the ways of God, the genius of God, the power of God, the logic of God in His conduct of human affairs, the infinite facets of His creative endeavors, the unfathomable dimensions of His vocabulary—and the many dangers and pitfalls in imagining that we mortals, with our limited intelligence, can replace God. So what is the point of Genesis chapter 1, if it is, in the final resort, incomprehensible?

We clearly cannot understand it in terms of an attempt at an *explanation* of cosmology, but, rather, as a *song of praise* of cosmology, an epic poem, bordering on a prayer, but certainly *not* a prosaic history.

The Babylonians had their Enuma Elish and Gilgamesh epics. We have our epic poems. What else is the *Ha'azinu*, where Moses actually addresses *shamayim va'aretz*, heaven and earth, and calls them as witnesses to a covenant? Our Torah ends with a poetic *Sidra* in the form of the blessing of Moses to all the tribes (Deut. 33). Why should it not commence in a similar vein, with a tribute to the Creator, by way of a simple, and overtly simplistic Creation poem; and, like a poem, why should we not understand it as setting out to induce a mood rather than to communicate information, to give a hint rather than elaborate an argument, to state a problem rather than to offer a solution, to release diverse ideas rather than a unitary philosophy?

Viewed in this poetic sense, we suggest that all of the apparent contradictions between the Genesis chapter 1 and Genesis chapter 2 accounts of Creation, that excited the "higher" critics, all fall away.

It is a simple poem of Creation. Indeed, God described the entire Torah as a song, a poem, when He told Moses—"And now write for yourself this song (*shirah*) and teach it to the children of Israel" (Deut. 31:19).

The Talmud (San.21b) actually infers from this verse that there is a duty on every Jew to write his own *Sefer Torah*. So *shirah* (song) and *Torah* are clearly synonymous terms.

To approach the Torah as a poem has always been the Pharisaic talmudic-rabbinic way—like a poem whose message is dependent not primarily upon what the poet had in mind when he framed the words, but upon the sentiments and emotions, reactions and meanings, that suggest themselves and inspire the reader.

222 : Judaism

Its words become transformed into a trigger, a stimulus, a transformer for the alternating literary, spiritual, and emotional currents of the poet to become converted into a meaningful source of kindred, though not necessarily identical, energy within the reader.

Again, the Torah assures us that *that* is its purpose: *lo bashamayim hi*—“It is no longer in heaven” (Deut. 30:12). God has composed His poem for us. Having given it to us, it becomes exclusively ours. It is for us to interpret, and not exclusively in accordance with its literal sense.

It is a poem. Our poem. A most lofty, inspirational, and complex poem. It is a living, *expanding* Torah, like the universe itself. And its prelude is the Creation story—the most poetic of all!

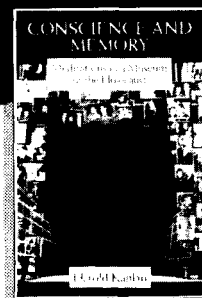
HAROLD KAPLAN **CONSCIENCE AND MEMORY**

Meditations in a Museum of the Holocaust

The opening of the Holocaust museum sparked a debate that reflects a larger debate over the Holocaust's “meaning,” its translatability for ordinary understanding. The museum itself, according to Kaplan has become an impressive memorial to humanism crossing cultural and political barriers, instructing the collective memory of this democracy and that of nations everywhere which aspire to civil existence.

“*Conscience and Memory* is informed by a profound and long-meditated piety. It has a quiet nobility about it. It is a most compelling work.”—Mark Krupnick, author of *Lionel Trilling and the Fate of Cultural Criticism*.

Cloth \$24.95 214 pages



**THE UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO PRESS**
5801 S. ELLIS AVE.
CHICAGO, IL 60637

DISCOVER

CONGRESS MONTHLY

And enhance your understanding of Jewish life

CONGRESS MONTHLY, the journal of the American Jewish Congress, is a leading source of informed opinion about significant developments in Jewish life. Now in its 61st year of publication, CONGRESS MONTHLY appears 6 times a year. It continues to treat and comment on virtually all of the issues of concern to the Jewish community—political, social, and cultural; Israel; U.S. and international affairs. Its distinguished contributors constitute a virtual “Who’s Who” of the Jewish intellectual community throughout the world.

Mail Coupon to:

CONGRESS MONTHLY
15 East 84th Street
New York, NY 10028

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Please enclose a check with your choice of:

- ☐ One year \$11.00
- ☐ Two years \$21.00
- ☐ Three years \$30.00

U.S. currency only; outside U.S., \$2.00 extra per year.

NEW AND RECENT BOOKS ON JEWISH STUDIES

Order from your bookstore or direct from the publisher. Major credit cards accepted. Call (908) 932-2280.

In the United States:



transaction publishers
Department 94AJS3
Rutgers—The State University
New Brunswick, NJ 08903

In the United Kingdom:



transaction publishers (UK) Ltd
Plymbridge Distributors Ltd
Estover, Plymouth PL6 7PZ
United Kingdom

THE HOLOCAUST AND THE WAR OF IDEAS

Edward Alexander

Alexander begins with an analysis of ancient and modern anti-Semitism as the primary cause of the destruction of European Jewry. He interprets representative works from the three main bodies of Holocaust literature—Yiddish, American, Hebrew—in relation to the war of ideas that surrounds the historical catastrophe that is their subject.

ISBN: 1-56000-122-4 (cloth) 250 pp. \$32.95

THE JEWISH IDEA AND ITS ENEMIES

Edward Alexander

"This book is an indispensable weapon for those Jews who wish to arm themselves for the war of ideas that now faces us."

—Paul Eidelberg, *The Jewish Press Magazine*

"Edward Alexander is a superb polemicist, an essayist of wit, elegance, logic, irony, and allusive power."—Cynthia Ozick

ISBN: 0-88738-873-6 (paper) 264 pp. \$19.95

NEUTRALIZING MEMORY

The Jew in Contemporary Poland

Iwona Irwin-Zarecka

"This is an important book, on a subject of profound and continuing sorrow and contention. It deserves not only to be read, but pondered and studied by Jews and Poles and by all concerned with the Holocaust and the abiding questions of antisemitism and interethnic or interreligious relations."

—Florence A. Ruderman, CUNY, Brooklyn College

ISBN: 0-88738-227-4 (cloth) 220 pp. \$34.95

ISBN: 0-88738-840-X (paper) 220 pp. \$18.95

THE CHIEF RABBI, THE POPE, AND THE HOLOCAUST

An Era in Vatican-Jewish Relations

Robert G. Weisbord and Wallace P. Sillanpoa

In 1945, Israele Zolli, chief rabbi of Rome's ancient Jewish community shocked the Jewish world by converting to Catholicism. This book is the first authoritative treatment of this astonishing story from one of the darkest eras in Jewish history.

ISBN: 0-88738-416-1 (cloth) 225 pp. \$34.95

THE ABYSS OF DESPAIR

Nathan Hanover

With a new introduction by William Helmreich

Nathan Hanover provides a gripping, first-hand account of the Chmielnicki massacres in 1648-58, in which thousands of Jews perished in Poland and the Ukraine. He describes the events themselves as well as their effect on European Jewry.

ISBN: 0-87855-927-2 (paper) 140 pp. \$19.95

transaction

JUDAISM



\$6.00

SPRING 1994